The Foundations for Peace Network’s strategic conference:

The Role of Philanthropy in Peacebuilding Efforts to Tackle Structural Injustice in South Asia

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Summary Report
Welcome:
Santosh Samal (Dalit Foundation, India)

Foundation for Peace (FFP) members have found that ongoing structural injustice precedes or occurs simultaneously with violent conflict. Thus any attempt to build lasting peace needs to address the systemic injustices that cause or perpetuate conflict. As grant-making organizations, FFP’s members endeavour in this conference to explore the role that philanthropy plays or could play to address injustice as part of peacebuilding efforts. This conference explores justice-oriented philanthropy in peacebuilding efforts from the perspective of indigenous funders, non-indigenous funders, and grassroots partners. The conference focuses on South Asia but its insights should be globally relevant.

Introduction to the work of Foundations for Peace (FFP):
Sithie Tiruchelvam (Neelan Tiruchelvan Trust, Sri Lanka)

FFP is “A global network of independent indigenous funders working to advance equality, diversity and interdependence in areas of entrenched and persistent communal conflict, with a history of, or potential for, violence.” In this context, “indigenous” means funders based in the country in which their support is directed, often deeply connected to their grassroots partners. This is in contrast to “non-indigenous” funders, which are international foundations that provide much-needed support to NGOs but for practical and administrative reasons often cannot be as deeply embedded in grassroots communities.

The FFP network and this conference aim responds to the need for peer solidarity and support among indigenous funders. FFP members exchange Good Practices and lessons learned, facilitate exchanges between their grantees and partners, and strengthen communication with international funders. We are committed to “Activist Philanthropy” which includes:

• Identifying unique roles that cannot be filled by Government or the Market. Using a variety of strategies to contribute to sustainable change.
• Offering resources other than money to our partners. Using money as a flexible and timely investment.
• Considering how social change happens and ensuring our work contributes to that big picture.
• Being a leader on important issue over the long-term if necessary.
• Engaging with a range of stakeholders and proactively seeking out pressing issues.

**Small Money, Big Impact: Social Justice and Peace-building – Making the Connections:**
Avila Kilmurray (Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, Ireland)

This presentation highlights some of the insights of the FPP publication “Small Money, Big Impact,” which is available on our website (http://www.foundationsforpeace.org/). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. advises us: “Philanthropy is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice which make philanthropy necessary.”

With that charge, we note what brings FFP members together. We are striving to make change at the root causes of structural injustice – not simply provide charity to victims of conflict. In addition, we are all based in states that were formed reasonably recently. New states can lack confidence in their own cohesion as they attempt to develop a sense of national identity among their populace. As a result, these states often oppress minorities because their difference is seen as threatening to the state’s attempt to unify its citizens. Because minorities’ demands for rights are seen as a threat to the state, minorities are marginalized to the point of physical violence. In this process, social injustice leads to conflict, which is the connection for FFP between injustice and peacebuilding.

When outbreaks of violent conflict do occur, issues of social justice are viewed as secondary if not irrelevant. Military solutions are applied to what are fundamentally social problems. And when transitioning out of violent situations, policy makers so fixed on peace that issues of justice can be ignored. Doing so lays the seeds of injustice that will fuel conflict in the next generation. FFP members promote considerations of justice in peacebuilding to create durable peace.

Many members are concerned with “clustered injustice,” where a number of social issues combine to create “unstable peace” or “frozen war” – a situation that could easily explode into violence. We can make clustered injustice visible by asking questions such as:

• What are the power imbalances and causes of this social injustice?
• Who are most marginalized by the current situation and how can their voices be heard?
• Which institutions/attitudes could impact the issue?
• What are the non-violent strategies that could be supported?

During unstable peace, possible interventions as local funders include:

• Partnering with excluded groups to develop confidence and demands for policy change or fund experts to offer this training
• Invest in research to document and publicize the problem and demands for change
• Fund cross-community dialogue and alliance building
• Offer international contacts and support in generating international awareness and pressure
• Protect symbolic figures who are raising justice concerns, including artists

In situations of actual violence, often international donors worry about getting involved politically or for safety reasons so indigenous funders need to be even more present. Our interventions can be guided by these questions:

• Will the initiative diffuse tension and build bridges?
• Are we demonizing the Other while attempting to support minorities?
• Will the initiative promote human rights and use non-violent means?
• Does it support groups directly affected by the violence (ie, the worst-hit victims)?
• Does it support the introduction of new ideas to alleviate violence? (For example, in response to the power of inflammatory rumours, an Irish organization created a network of women peace-makers equipped with cell phones that could respond to brewing tension.)

When societies are emerging from violent conflict, there is a lot of emphasis from the United Nations on “Peace-keeping” (militarily) and “peace-making” (treaties) but not much on “peacebuilding,” which aims to reweave the fabric of society at a deep level. We can consider:
• Who is not at the peace-making table and who is benefiting from “the Peace?”
• What social justice issues being sidelined?
• How can institutions understand and deal with the legacy of the past?

Our interventions could include:
• Sharing the experiences of other societies emerging from violent conflict and division
• Support the re-integration of Victims (especially women) and Ex-Combatants into society, as well as their families
• Work with the media to ensure they create a balanced dialogue on tense issues

John Paul Lederach charts how to engage each level of society in peacebuilding. The elite are tapped for official negotiations but we can strengthen the voices of institutions (religious, labour, academic) and grassroots leaders in social dialogue. Our role is to facilitate sharing horizontally (with in each tier) and even more so, vertically (between the grassroots, institutions, and elite) to highlight social justice issues.

Finally, indigenous funders have unique contributions to make toward peacebuilding:
• We serve as Knowledge Hubs, sharing information within and beyond the country.
• We can play a convening role – creating safe space for marginalized partners and facilitating conversation vertically. To do this, we have to use our privileged position in society to risk funding new and bold ideas – even paying for a plane ticket to create in-person dialogue between leaders of divided societies.
• We provide local insight. For example, in Sri Lanka a UN agency had channelled water to a refugee camp but bypassed a settled village along the way, creating conflict. As local funders, we know our context and can limit this sort of unintended harm.
• We can link with international funders and agencies to maintain global spotlight on the conflict and encourage long-term commitment to peacebuilding.

Defining the thematic framework of the conference
Gagan Sethi (Dalit Foundation, India)
You are in India – the land of contradictions. This country contains some of the most beautiful examples of peace and some of the most violent forms of human indignity. For those of us living this dialectic, we have to maintain a balance between experiencing these two extremes.

Dalit Foundation responds with compassion to centuries of caste conflict. Initially the Dalit struggle had to be exclusionary to establish identity. Now, we need to not only fight our battles but compassionately reach out to all those who believe in equality. For that reason, we changed the definition of “Dalit” to mean not just the beaten-down lowest-of-the-low castes but instead all those who believe in and fight for equality. This is a move from an exclusionary to an inclusionary position, part of building an India free of identity politics. DF represents the peacebuilding process within the Dalit movement.
Similarly, in any situation of conflict, the Uncompromising and the Compassionate need to be held in tension. We cannot compromise on basics principles but also need to understand the other side. The root cause of conflict is identity. For example, Gujarat is an Indian state in the midst of extreme inter-religious hatred. Two years after the “riots,” Hindu slum children were playing “Cops & Robbers” as a game of “Kill the Muslim.” When society produces hatred so deep that it is perpetuated by children, it only needs the smallest spark to become violent.

Identity and exclusion are fundamentally tied. Caste and religious identity start with a positive celebration of difference. However, before long these identities demand the exclusion of others. Social boycott is commonly used by the upper castes to humiliate lower castes. Starting in the family, it is taught to exclude girls. Children learn that to exclude is to gain supremacy. Perhaps the most meticulously designed space of exclusion in history is ‘Untouchability’. It is a composite of dozens of forms of social discrimination which are deeply embedded culturally. Untouchability codifies difference into hierarchies. Conflict is embedded in difference.

Is peace an absence of conflict or a celebration of diversity? Peace is a value which emerges from respect for basic human rights. It cannot be without justice. It depends on social rules being followed by all, as opposed to Brahmins making rules for Dalits or men making rules for women without following them.

The critical difference between a human being and an animal is the ability to reflect. Humans have a sense of history and this core trait has helped humans advance. We must preserve this trait through genuine reflection. One point of reflection must be the moral dilemmas of Justice versus Mercy and Truth versus Loyalty. We can consider these tensions in different ways. There are three ways to think:

1. Rule-based thinking is derived from the rules that institutions (family, work, state) hand down to us. It prevents us from intervening at times or violating the status quo.
2. Ends-based thinking is “the ends justify the means.” This produces conflict because it disregards the need for a peaceful process in pursuing one’s goal.
3. Care-based thinking lies in the middle and dictates careful evaluation of every situation. We make our decisions based on careful reflection.

As we proceed, let us focus not only on solutions but on our ability to handle the issues carefully and creatively.

**Injustice & Peace Building: Lessons from Failures**

**Syeda Hameed (Planning Commission, Govt. of India and Dalit Foundation)**

Yesterday I was in a place, 70 kilometres from where we are sitting. It was in Mewat, a district at the intersection of the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Of the total polulation of one million living there 99% of it is Muslim. It is right next to the most glitzy part of India but being there was like a time warp. It has fallen off any kind of radar screen of civil society support or foundations. It is a community with
a potential for violence because there is deprivation everywhere. The average family size is eight children. I saw a very small woman in labour and knew the cycle of malnutrition was about to be perpetuated. She was not striving for a boy – she already has four boys and one girl.

I am very committed to this community and will do what I can but governments have a certain set thinking-by-the-rule that it is hard for one official to change. Many issues have gone unimproved after years, such as “honor killings.” In the Heyla community of Madhya Pradesh ‘Untouchability’ persists in the slums. It is very difficult to push against people’s mindsets. I am sceptical of statistics that say it is all better.

As a Muslim on Dalit Foundation’s board, I am expressing my belief that we need to work on each other’s issues. My philosophical underpinning for this belief was expressed recently by Amartya Sen at a dialogue in Kolkata. He said, “Liberation from positional sequestering may not always be easy but it is a challenge that ethical, legal, and political thinking has to take on board.” We have to take on the lens of the person who we hope to help. For example, yesterday I went to a huge lake and was flooded by 500 people saying that the state should buy this land and turn it into a source of drinking water, which they lack. Someone got up and started explaining a World Bank scheme that is supposed to address this issue but the people could not understand him. We have to speak to people in a language they understand.

In response to the question about simmering conflict, there are indeed conflicts that have been covert for a long time. Discrimination causes this simmering over time. We need to direct more funds toward potential conflict areas where injustice persists.

Structural injustice outlined in the regional context of South Asia with a focus on Sri Lanka

Ambika Satkunanathan (Neelan Tiruchelvan Trust, Sri Lanka)

In Sri Lanka, structural injustice has led to armed conflict. Movements for minority rights are seen as threats to national security and subject to harassment and violence. The global War on Terror has served as a cover for the curtailing of civil liberties. This climate also enables the government to dismiss root causes of social problems and label them instead as “terrorist problems.”

Our demands are challenged by the “peace-through-development” paradigm. This paradigm holds that increased economic security will lead to peace – as opposed to the resolution of historical and social conflict. By perpetuating this paradigm, Sri Lanka has depoliticized and dehistoricized the conflict without really addressing disparities of power. In actuality, economic development widens gaps between people and can displace marginalized people.

To deal with historical injustice, the past must be acknowledged. Attempts to forget conflict require ruling memory constructed by the dominant group as opposed to a shared memory that includes the victim’s perspective. Communities that have experienced collective violence cannot perceive themselves as part of a unity without acknowledgement of their pain.

In terms of strategies for social justice in South Asia, rights groups are revisiting the success of litigation and legal reform. Even once the laws are there, people still cannot access these rights. For this reason, we need to move beyond formal equality and focus on substantive equality. What is the effect of the law? Moving forward, we are considering what the role is of indigenous grant-makers. How can they enable and empower survivors? How can we support groups in demanding redress for historical injustice?
Role of indigenous donors in sustainable peacebuilding efforts

Moderator: Sithie Tiruchelvam

Mari Thekaekara (Dalit Foundation, India)
As a journalist on Dalit/tribal issues and a Board member of Dalit Foundation, I have been reflecting a lot on this framing of our work as “peacebuilding.” We do not usually think of the Dalit struggle as peace work in part because the conflict we address spans millennia. Still, we address sustained violence – every hour two Dalits are assaulted and every day two Dalit homes are torched. M.F. Hussain (a leading artist) was hounded out of India by right-wingers because the state is unable to protect him. But at least he had somewhere to go. For the Dalits of this country, there is no where to go. The Indian government has declared that we are not an underdeveloped country any more. This makes our struggle harder because publically now India is “shining” but still these atrocities are happening.

Caste is an issue that we all have learned to live with to some degree. It is easy to not be aware of the crisis if you are not experiencing it, or to assume it is exaggerated. Abominable practices have been normalized, like Manual Scavenging – the manual removal of human waste, done almost exclusively by Dalits. People quibble that caste is not racism, but in fact it is just as bad or worse. In this context, power is seen as a zero-sum game – if you have any, it will take away mine. Therefore if a Dalit wears slippers through the village, it is seen as bringing down the power of upper castes. When can our people expect equality in this country?

Dalit Foundation is developing young leadership for the Dalit Movement. In addition, we have a mentorship program in which senior Dalit professionals mentor Dalits trying to make it as young professionals or aspiring students. We also give fellowships to Dalit artists to celebrate their under-recognized artistry. We are trying to promote consciousness of terminology – instead of saying “upper caste” it is more appropriate to say “dominant caste.” In the end, we need to get mainstream India to be ashamed of the dichotomy in our society. Bollywood actors need to say that caste discrimination “is not cool.” Our vision is that non-Dalits join Dalits to fight caste discrimination.

Rita Thapa (Tewa, Nepal)
I started my work in the mid-1990s without really knowing what “peace work” meant. We created safe spaces in conflict areas of Nepal. These “Peace Centers” had local advocacy resources and counselling. These centers run with the help of community members affected by the conflict who had gone through a year-long training program or others who had been trained and deployed there.

In trying to ground this work conceptually, I got my masters and found in my research that women suffer more and differently during conflict. Thus in any situation of conflict, there to provide immediate support and capacity building to women, as well as ensure their security. There are attacks on women human rights defenders still today in Nepal. In addition, any negotiations should extend beyond the elite and include women and other grassroots leaders.

In Nepal the state provides hardly anything to the people. In fact, all the structures of power are largely discredited and have abused their positions. Why does the state have to live?

Shaheen Anam (Manusher Jonno Foundation, Bangladesh)
Our foundation addresses women’s human rights through funding and capacity-building, including organizing training. We focus on rights because development work might help people a little bit but does not last in the long-term. As an indigenous foundation, we are able to be very connected and enmeshed with our people. We support 120 organizations and together with our partners question the structures of power in Bangladesh.

Our targets are the most marginalized – women, sex workers, landless people, and minorities. Bangladesh is a very homogenous country – 90% of the population speaks the same language. This has led to an arrogance of the majority. We aim to bring about awareness of minority communities and build harmony as well as influence policy makers. There is a large (1 million) member Dalit community and Untouchability is practiced, which most people do not know about.

We are supporting partners to mobilize, raise their voices, and question the root causes of injustice. One priority is improving the local justice system, especially with regard to discrimination against women. We are also working on legal reform, including pushing for the creation of an anti-discrimination law with the help of Dalit Foundation. Just this week our legislature passed an anti-domestic violence law. Till now there is no Hindu Marriage Act, and a signature campaign is ongoing to get Hindu women the right to marriage registration. We are help respond to spontaneous movements – such as the push for electricity. People need electricity for irrigating their land. Seven people died in the electricity protests but the movement is making some difference.

Most important is an acknowledgement from the state about structural injustice. It is so hypocritical right now and must admit the injustices that are ongoing. Though it is daunting, it is crucial that focus on this and support each other in the struggle.

Sujatha Rita (Nirnaya Trust, India)

We work in the state of Orissa on the rights of women and children and issues of violence, especially related to the inter-religious violence of 2008. They facilitated a fact-finding team to find out from women what their experiences were and got 33 people to give testimony. They try to play this role – of bringing common people together and providing a common forum. They take an issue from the ground and inject additional support. In Orissa they have targeted women and adolescents, setting up general relief centres as well as relief centres for women. Some of the lessons learned have been:

- Most conflicts have a socioeconomic context. When economically disadvantaged people do not have access to information, it is very difficult for them to know what to do.
- Women are usually the targets of the most violence. At the relief camps, women would be denied assistance if they did not disclose the location of their husbands. Yet if the men come down to the camp, they would be arrested on false charges.
- Throughout the Orissa conflict, the State did not respond. Silence is an acceptance of hate and violence. When the Government says, “We have everything under control,” it is a way of removing people from being active citizens.
- Ordinary citizens given encouragement – especially from public officials – come up with creative solutions to deal with their problems. They organized a forum of 750 women and helped them define “community” as a place where differences can and should exist.
- Collective action is almost always necessary to bring about anything effective.
• Media has escalated the conflict. It is not balanced or representative and can be misleading by spreading allegations.
• Lots of people who could get involved were reluctant because of the lack of security for peace builders.
• Anytime a bandh (strike) or other measures is called, look for measures that bring about unity and not further division.

In the end, the System is not responsive to violence and is controlled by dominant groups. Our work is about empowering everyday people to gain power.

**Ambika Satkunanathan (Neelan Tiruchelvan Trust, Sri Lanka)**
The Trust is eight years old. They used to do peace and human rights work. However when the political context changed in 2005, a new regime came in with military power. The State sent a clear message that to talk of “peace” meant that the State should negotiate, which was seen as anti-state terrorism. Since the war has ended there is even less space to do peace work. Why talk about peace, when there’s no war?! Why talk about rights, when there was no ethnic conflict?! Only Development (building infrastructure) is an acceptable goal. You have to get approval before doing any work. International donors do not support rights work in Sri Lanka because they have read the message from the State to only support Development.

In this context, we see peace broadly, as dealing with discrimination through different mechanisms.
• We actively seek small groups who are doing peace work though they do not see it as such. They live in multi-ethnic villages that still experience tension and they are building bridges and doing rights trainings in the process of livelihood support.
• We fund groups that support victims of conflict. However any type of psycho-social support is dangerous because it implies that there was trauma.
• We encouraging people to promote non-controversial rights such as language rights.
• We try to keep journalists and human rights activists safe, as they are constantly under threat. We function as a hub and get them out of the country or to the capital Colombo if needed.

One achievement has been to break down bias against the controversial leader in whose memory we were founded. Now people seek support from all ethnic backgrounds and see us as serving the whole.

**Henry Tiphagne (Dalit Foundation, India)**
Dalit Foundation exists in a post-Durban context. The 2001 Durban World Conference Against Racism created visibility for caste as never before and that was the seed of the foundation. Our goal was to restore back to the local communities what the international community was trying to give us. We wanted to locate people who also had small dreams to be achieved in parts of the country that existing donors were not reaching or were not focusing on as a policy.

For us, the process of relating to the grantees is as important as the product of what the grantees do. We strive to articulate to the country a reframing of who is “Dalit” – not only people born in the Dalit community but anyone who wants to dine with, speak out with, and so on with the so-called Dalits. We call on NGOs who are working on education, health, and other issues to integrate caste sensitivities into their work. We are trying to support work that generates human rights defenders who can look at the larger issues.

**Questions & Answers**
• Is support directed toward rights for LGBT people and people of the third gender?
Henry Tiphagne said that the transgender movement in Tamil Nadu has been very politicized, especially the Dalit community within it. Sheehan Anam said they have supported LGBT groups and have faced backlash because of it, though they are persisting.

- How do indigenous donors see things differently than international donors
A lot of international donors make their decisions outside of their communities and are not as familiar necessarily with the local context. A benefit to being local is that our partners tell us if we have got it wrong. You would not be that frank with an international donor. Also we can seek out applications – for example, from an LGBT group.
- Do you find a tension between making grants and implementing?
This is an ongoing dialogue possible when you are a local funder and it can become problematic. We try to see ourselves not as implementing but facilitating. We are seen as partners rather than funders. We support movements, we don’t fund movements.
If you’re local you can be proactive – seek out applications in LGBT issue for example whereas that’s not possible with international groups.
- Are you addressing the conflicts in Jammu and Kashmir and in Northeast India?
This is because we don’t have FFP members there, not because they are not important conflicts. We don’t speak on situations we don’t have experience of. We have a strategic gap in Latin America and Africa. Also, FFP members are not just local funders but those with an ideology of human rights and peacebuilding. There are many indigenous funders who have a different value bases.

Unanswered questions:
How sustained is the kind of support that donor organizations engage with? (not 1-3 yrs) How do you deal with sub-caste discrimination? How do you support children impacted by communal violence? How do you address medium-sized groups who need support?

Film as a medium for peacebuilding and conflict resolution
Sharmila Tagore, Chair of Central Board of Film Certification, India

“Philanthropy” literally means “to love a human being.” Greek adapted this word to mean full human development. It is translated into Latin as “Human-ness.” We are gathering to consider today how to promote love of the human being in a world where 90% of the assets are in the hands of 5% of the population. In India, caste remains a primary source of identity. In the face of these challenges, can film play a role in social justice and peace? Maybe.

Popular films are seen by many and thus could have an influential role in promoting peace. Yet because they aim at a large audience their message must be widely-acceptable. As such, films can express popular discontent but they also reinforce common prejudices. Mature films that take a nuanced view of social issues are often not seen by the public because they fail to make sufficient connection with the audience. Perhaps people feel uncomfortable with the truth and look to film for comfort/entertainment, forcing film away from social commentary. Overall, films are complex cultural texts. Three Idiots became a hit because people see it through different lenses – some see it as dealing with brokenness of the educational system but others see it as simply an interpersonal drama.

Film is both art and a commercial commodity. But at the end of the day, commerce and not philanthropy is at the heart of cinema – therefore it is unrealistic to look at cinema as key to social change. Imparting educational and social methods is simply not its priority. As such, films by themselves can never achieve
social change. We could do an impact-assessment on the impact of the film industry on people’s attitudes. I do think that film can change behaviour about indulgence – eat this brand of cheese, for example. But when you ask them to give up something – i.e. caste power – it is a different story.

Still, film can start a campaign or be made as part of a campaign. Film can trigger debate, provide valuable insights into the lives of others in society, and redefine our values. Most documentary filmmakers say their films make impact only when they are part of a larger movement. Shyam Benegal’s *Manthan* is a unique example. It was funded by 500,000 Indian farmers — members of the Gujarat Milk Marketing Foundation — who donated two rupees apiece to its production. The movie is the story of an attempt by a small government-sponsored team to organize a milk marketing cooperative in a village of the western state of Gujarat. It focused on caste and class oppression in Indian rural life and told a story of struggles to organize a cooperative in opposition to the entrenched rural power structure. *Three Idiots* mirrored people’s experience of the challenges of the educational system and as such could fuel a movement. Secularism, freedom, and democracy are our most important ideals.

More important than the role of film is the role of real people – particularly civil society. All the important rights movements happened because people mobilized. To consider another genre, will online activism make an impact on the ground? I have found that most effective communication is interpersonal – people to people. Recall the Chipko movement – where each woman hugged a tree to prevent it from being cut down. We need to connect with each other. We should expect is for TV channels to give us free space. As it is, there is no space for public dialogue.

Engage movers-and-shakers in the entertainment world to lend their voices to your cause. This can be hard because celebrities are sometimes looking for charity causes and not social change. In particular, sports celebrities are too busy and too young to be very reflective. They are built in the image of corporations. Everyone is looking toward these young people to make an intervention but we cannot expect that of them. And when involving stars, be careful because often celebrities end up hijacking the movement. It becomes about their personality and not the issue. If 10,000 people come to see a celebrity, make sure the microphone is always given to somebody who knows the issue better than them. Celebrities should also become ambassadors for particular issues. However, in terms of the conflict issues that most of the NGOs here are working on, it is a tough sell. In situations of political unrest it is too scary for someone vulnerable to the public to align themselves with one side. Lastly, celebrities can do better about donating proceeds. Bollywood actors are becoming real-life heroes – make them live up to this heroic reputation!

[The idea emerged at the end of this discussion about a Bollywood Foundation.]
Perspective of donors (involved in both indigenous and non-indigenous grantmaking practices) on the role of philanthropy in peace building efforts in South Asia

Moderator: Vijay Parmar

Vanita Mukherji (Ford Foundation, India)
The State has failed to ensure citizenship rights to its population. There is a lack of pluralism, toleration, and respect for diversity. This has given rise to identity politics and the process of Othering. In that context, I have tried to support groups working daily on conflict resolution. Our role is “promoting, protecting, and enabling.” For example, the Aman Trust is working in the state of Bihar and they came into caste conflict in which 40 or 50 men were killed. Charity is part of social change sometimes. These widows needed skill-building and they turned to the Aman Trust. With their guidance, the women formed a group to work the land. They turned to legal remedies as a group and out of 140 cases, the Aman Trust helped get justice for a huge number of them.

We allow our partners to have space for creativity. Donors need to be flexible. For example, we support the Society for the Promotion of Strategic Thinking. After the Gujarat riots they brought students from Hindu and Muslim families together and demystified the Other. A great deal is dependent on context. We work in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and India and each locality is very different. We are also multi-disciplinary and multi-issue, addressing the holistic needs of societies in which they work.

Belinda Bennett (Christian Aid)
As we discuss peace, the question I keep asking myself is “Whose peace?” Is peace a by-product of addressing injustice? “We are looking for a peace that can only be found in human rights.” And as funders our first priority is Do No Harm.

In 2004 we started to work with the most in-need groups. We found a lack of leadership in the community and started trying to catalyze its growth. We prioritized values-based organizations. We didn’t have space for men in the women’s movement; we must make space for non-Dalits in the Dalit movement. We must be reflective. What kind of patriarchy exists in our organizations? Are we perpetuating feudalism when people touch our feet? We can no longer compartmentalize different issues – it is all discrimination. I was at a land rights workshop in Southern India and by day the activists were all together calling for greater rights and equality. But when the session ended, the women cooked and the men collected money to go into the town. We cannot let this compartmentalization of issues continue.
Also consider working with the private sector. They have the power to help. Corporate responsibility they are open to but we also need to talk about corporate accountability without scaring them off.

**Poonam Muttreja (MacArthur Foundation)**

There has been criticism of US-based funders working in developing countries and I understand why. Looking at international donors you see big money and where is the impact? That is what I am looking for. Much of MacArthur’s funding has been to universities and think-tanks. In the world, the majority of think-tanks are located around DC. And what has been the benefit? The US has created more insecurity in the world! I also consider the question, “Where is the dissent?” In most countries, dissent is seen as unpatriotic. When people do dissent, it is not amplified in the media. In India (the biggest democracy in the world), dissent has not been functioning at full-capacity.

Historically, MacArthur has funded US-based thinking. However, in 2008 it funded 27 Asian think-tanks in a good network of communication. We do not have the capacity to work with indigenous groups. Frankly, MacArthur still has a US/Western lens so it is better that we stay away from trying to influence work on the ground, which can have damaging unintended consequences.

The axis of economic power is shifting from west to east. Soon many more foundations will come to this part of the world. Bill Gates is investing huge sums of money in India. The India-China relationship (more than India-Pakistan) will shape peace in the region.

We do not have mechanisms for collaboration in South Asia. First we need to acknowledge the problems honestly. The Government and security community thinks that the Maoist movement is a law-and-order problem. No – tribals have been marginalized for decades and if they join a movement like this it is about something deeper. We accept discrimination against girls in the majority of households. We have to blow up our myths about each other – for example that Muslims have higher fertility rates. It is not the case in Kerala where literacy rates are high.

We need to be wary of greedy NGOs and not give them money! Their greed leaves very little support for genuine NGOs. Technical support (by people like Barry Knight) is crucial to help good NGOs write better proposals. Ideally, our foundations would collaborate more. As it stands, there is a lot of animosity and competition between the heads of international foundations.

What is non-negotiable is that we do not support values that promote violence (whether domestic, caste, or religious violence). This may not be clear on the surface. If a rights movement burns buses when they protest, is it violence? Yes. We need to be real about following Ghandi. Do an analysis of one riot and consider the economic cost of the number of buses burned, people who did not go to work, shops who did not get business. The Left is being booted out of these countries because it did not contribute to economic growth.

**Nayana Chowdhury (Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, India)**

The Trust is 80 years old. We believe that the path to peace is not to divide people up into their separate groups but to share power together. The Trust has been a laid-back donor (people reach out to us generally) but now we are reaching out more to work on development in conflict areas. We focus on access to entitlements in conflict zones. In addition, we focus on the creation of identity beyond the caste/religion
that is the source of conflict. For example, in Kandhamal (Orissa), you see glaring discrimination against Dalits. Even the CBOs (Community-Based Organizations) would make the Dalits sit outside their home. Yet even so, when last round of violence broke out, we found that the CBOs had created an identity for their members beyond their ethnic/religious identity and this helped their members not engage in the conflict. Because of the relationships between members and between a network of seven CBOs, after the 2008 riot tribal families helped 80 displaced Dalit families get to a YMCA.

My portfolio – Civil Society, Democracy and Human Rights – is trying to widen the space for democratic participation. This is a necessary pre-requisite for peace. One of the challenges we confront is how historical conflicts are not prioritized. Why can't riot be seen as a disaster situation? When there is a natural disaster, the aid comes flooding in. But when there is a man-made disaster people say, “Don’t go there.” Only religiously-coloured organizations reach out. The mother in a relief camp because of communal violence is just as deserving as if she was there because of flooding.

Another challenge is our ability to support small organizations. They often do not write well so it is easier to give to re-granting organizations like Dalit Foundation. Plus our finance department does not want to process ten small grants instead of one big one. But we need to do more to reach out to small groups.

Vijay Parmar (Janvikas, India)
In the 1970s, there was a lot of action around collective economic issues. However since the ‘90s, activism has been more on identity-based issues. This was driven in part by politicians and religious fundamentalists that depend on polarization. In confronting this reality, we must be flexible instead of rigid. Some NGOs are very rule-based which is impossible for rights work.

Questions & Answers
• What is so different about South Asia?
  Spirituality is a real priority for us and we have to attend to this aspect of peacebuilding.
• Why do written proposals dominate NGO selection? This privileges more educated applicants.
  Nayana Chowdhury responded that written proposals are not the only way to assess NGOs and should not be. But there are practical concerns that limit our ability to do field visits or in-person conversations with everybody. Many decisions are made in US or UK headquarters. And even if a program officer could investigate a NGO further, there are a lot of people in the industry that are not working with such passion. Finally, the merit of a proposal is not just measured on language but on vision. We sit and work with partners on proposals that have been funded already – for the sake of the clarity of the plan.

Dalit Foundation representatives discussed the Project Selection Workshop model that they use. In this format, selected applicants come to a three-day workshop where they are assessed on their vision and leadership skills while learning about Dalit issues. There was also some discussion of giving people who are already leaders “awards” rather than “grants.”
Neelam Besra (Jharkhand, India)
We address discrimination and violence that women face at the hands of men, particularly in the adivasi (tribal) community. There are serious issues with social discrimination and women do not have any property rights or access to land. There are no fair wages. Children are in poor health. Adivasis and women are not represented politically. Men abandon their families and their abandoned wives, like widows, have no social support/security and face sexual violence. There is also violence for dowry.

My group tries to find solutions to these problems. We hold meetings and rallies and have gotten a key road built in their community. We led a movement to get drinking water and the local government finally provided that service. We have also worked with those below the poverty line to ensure safety nets are available to them.

Madhurani Dhakal (Tewa, Nepal)
The people who suffer most from conflict are the innocent people. Maoists use innocent villagers as shields against the army and the army also harasses the innocent. After 10 years, there is peace but the scars of the conflict remain very strong. The people most affected are the women and the youth. Youth feel hopeless with no jobs or skills. They might again join the Maoists. Many women were widowed, many children became orphans, and many parents became childless.

My organization supports the most marginalized communities. At great risk, we started a dialogue with the Maoists. We have organized small grants to get the people back to earning a livelihood. We organize counselling for those who have been traumatized. We are working toward the rehabilitation and reintegration of youth into society. An effort is ongoing to track down missing people as per international guidelines. Politically, we promote a call for general amnesty for everyone, however we believe that those who are accused of gross violations of human rights should not be given amnesty.

Sonoti Murma (Manusher Jonno Foundation, Bangladesh)
We work in 66 villages building harmony between majority and minority populations. We developed participatory action-research groups that each has five people from minority groups and five from mainstream groups. These groups identify all the problems in the area – land rights of minorities and poverty mostly. We have started 24 movements on land rights and got some land back by doing advocacy with local officials. We have a livelihood/income generation program. We also organized a Rice Bank with 800 kilograms of rice for seasons when we cannot buy rice. In addition, we hold an education program for dropped-out children – coaching them to be able to re-enter mainstream schools. Through negotiating with the local government we have been able to get sanitation and roads built.

Sandhya Davi (Dalit Foundation, India)
Everyone wants peace and so do we. Our organization focuses on Dalits, especially women, always using non-violent strategies. Anyone who can tolerate maximum pain is the one to carry on the nonviolent movement and we believe that is Dalit women because they face caste, class, and gender discrimination. The three types of action that we undertake are:

1. Setting up active non-violent actors at the grassroots level
2. Getting women their citizenship rights – to own property, to speak out
3. Changing society’s perspective toward Dalits

Our key issues are property rights, political participation, and access to education. We have had many achievements, including that 300 women won property in their names. In the end, by demeaning Dalits the society loses its own dignity. How can we create a dignified society?

Chandrika Sahai said that the Indian government provides some good welfare schemes. If they are implemented would that bring about greater dignity?

Sandhya answered: No, these schemes force us to beg for so little! They want to give us Rs. 2/KG of rice but what they should do is give us two acres of land per family, in the woman’s name, so we can grow our own food! Instead they give 1000 acres of land to corporations. I said this to Sonia Ghandi as well!
Summing Up and Closing Address

Gagan Sethi (Dalit Foundation, India)
Five Hindi words that start with an “s” sound are our goals: Self-respect, power, security, struggle, and education. We must keep these as our focus. Some key lessons of today are:

- Produce more local (indigenous) grantmakers.
- Focus on supporting leadership building. As local grantmakers, we are better positioned to do that than the international grant-makers.
- Focus on peace as intrinsic to human rights.
- Focus on inclusion – within our organizations, within civil society, and within society.
- Learn to dialogue. The ability to dialogue means giving up arrogance because dialogue requires relating at an equal level. How will I encourage dialogue within myself, with others, and in the community?
- We must encourage informed giving. This is part of our role as local funders.
- Man-made disasters (usually man-made rather than women-made) should be treated as urgently and attentively as natural disasters are. Politically and practically, it is easier for us to be first-responders to these disasters than it is for international donors.
- We must consider how we can better counter the values that promote violence.

Santosh Samal (Dalit Foundation, India)
In South Asia we mostly have tacit conflict rather than overt conflict. However, these conflicts are still a priority to address because they are knots of unharnessed energy waiting to be triggered. Conflicts are fuelled by structural injustice and to diffuse them demands that these injustices are resolved in a lasting manner. Only by confronting injustice can we build peace.

Compiled by-
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