



Voices of SDG 16+: Stories for Global Action

SDG16+ and Covid-19 - Local Actions for Global Solutions

Moderated by Ms Bianca Pabotoy & Mr Peter van Sluijs
Wednesday, July 15, 2020, 8-9:30 EDT | 12-13:30 GMT

Event Recording: <https://youtu.be/ae7EBR8pOQY>
<https://voicesofsdg16plus.org/videos/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building on the resounding success of the 2019 Voices of SDG16+ campaign, the 2020 Voices of SDG16+ Campaign asked individuals and partners around the world to share short videos showcasing how they are contributing to advancing SDG16+, particularly in light of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Local civil society actors from around the world have shared their “stories” of best practices and extraordinary efforts being undertaken towards SDG16+ at the national and local levels in the face of the COVID-19 crisis.

After reviewing submissions from around the world, the most compelling five videos were selected and shared widely in the lead-up and during the 2020 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The successful videos showcased concrete examples of how SDG16+ is being implemented and is helping to positively impact people’s lives, as well as highlighting why participants feel that SDG16+ is important, despite the challenges represented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The five finalist storytellers were invited to share their stories during this dedicated 2020 HLPF side-event. The interactive, virtual event also featured updates and reflections from the winners of last year’s campaign.

The event began with a compilation video from all of the finalists’ videos. After welcoming remarks and an introduction from the moderators, **Peter van Sluijs of Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS)** and **Bianca Pabotoy from Center for Peace Education in the Philippines**, a finalist of last year’s campaign, participants were given the floor to present their videos and further discuss their work on how they are implementing SDG16+ in context of COVID-19.

Representing **Justice Call in Egypt**, **Mr. Khaled Emam** presented their submission: **[“Youth’s Role to Achieve SDG16+: Why the localization of SDG16+ is more urgent than before.”](#)** Justice Call’s submission and presentation emphasized the important and critical role of young people in advancing peace and justice in the MENA region. In working towards expanded youth inclusion in peace processes and SDG16+ localization in the region, Mr. Emam also called for youth voices to be included in responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic and for governments, CSOs, and international organizations to protect civic spaces

Olla Al-Sakkaf of [Youth without Borders Organization for Development in Yemen](#) presented their video submission on their work to achieve peace, justice, and inclusive institutions through implementing different projects targeting various community groups-- particularly the Yemenese youth. SDG16+ has provided a clear understanding to communicate and implement approaches to peacebuilding. Ms Al-Sakkaf further discussed the inspiring story of hope in the midst of the conflict and challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the latter of which has posed a grave danger to the fragile state and to their continuing peacebuilding work. However, YWBOD has worked to support the health sector in Yemen and struck a note of hope in stating “where there is a will, there is a way.”

The third presenting finalist was **Mr. Patrick Bwire of the [Center for Conflict Resolution \(CECORE\) in Uganda](#)** showcasing their submission on their efforts towards advancing their SDG16+ localization model based on local voices within the community. In speaking on their work, Mr. Bwire stated that “the SDGs can only make sense if they translate to meaningful change at the local level” and “[we] must localize global agendas and globalize local voices.” Mr. Bwire expressed concern that progress on SDG16+ has stagnated in Uganda due to a lack of capacity of national infrastructures for peacebuilding. He concluded that especially within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable in society, “we cannot leave SDG16+ behind.” Mr. Bwire called on the international community to prioritize investment in community-level peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Loretta Ahuokpeme representing [Our Lady of Perpetual Help Initiative in Nigeria](#) presented their submission on their work to empower youth and women to prevent violence and promote peace in the communities in Nigeria and the Niger Delta. In her remarks, Ms. Loretta Ahuokpeme highlighted the interlinkages between SDG16+ and peacebuilding work with gender equality and climate security. For Ms. Ahuokpeme, SDG16+ has provided the platform to engage in peacebuilding and connection with advancing gender equality, access to healthcare, and environmental justice. Within the context of the challenges of access and lack of financial support exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic, Our Lady of Perpetual Help has made efforts to promote critical information through public awareness campaigns, as well as continued community follow-up to maintain peace and prevent radicalization in the midst of high levels of unemployment. Ms. Ahuokpeme maintained that “people-centered peacebuilding is the key to recovery and building resilience from this pandemic.”

The last presenting finalist was **Ghadanfar Kamanji of the International Legal Foundation presented their submission: [Going Out to Get You Home, Legal Aid During the Pandemic in Palestine](#)**. The video showcased ILF’s SDG16+ efforts in providing legal aid, promoting accountability and access to justice, and protecting citizen’s rights, especially during the pandemic. Working towards eliminating the justice gap, the group of 20 lawyers provide pro-bono legal support to children, youth, and detainees, as well as empowering vulnerable communities with critical information on their rights. Prisons and detention centers are particularly high-risk in terms of COVID-19 transmission and spread. During times of crisis, “the vision of SDG16+ is important now more than ever,” stated Mr. Kamanji.

After the sharing of the participants' peace stories, the moderators transitioned to a presentation of finalists from last year’s Voices of SDG16+ campaign. Alumna and documentary filmmaker, **Kasha Slavner from [the Global Sunrise Project](#)**, discussed her continued work to inspire action for the SDGs through solution-oriented storytelling that highlights the interlinkages between peace and climate justice. Ms. Slavner called for building a more peaceful, just and equitable world using SDG16+ as a guide and in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic-- “a convergence of the biggest threats of our time that highlights the inequality in society.” The next alum, **Ismail Mohamed from the [Center for](#)**

Policy Analysis in Somaliland, discussed their continued efforts to build peace, democracy, human rights and effective governance systems-- all under threat by the pandemic. Mr. Mohamed discussed the new Peace in Our Cities campaign to build a movement of citizens and local government and community leaders to end urban violence.

Opening up the floor, the audience raised several questions during the question and answer portion of the event. In response to the question of how the participants engage with young civil society actors and peacebuilders, Ms. Al-Sakkaf noted that the youth have the creativity to develop innovative solutions with small grant-funded projects in their community. Mr. Bwire drew attention to the difficulty of connecting with the community under social distancing guidelines and noted CECORE's use of networking on social platforms, door-to-door awareness, and local radio campaigns. Mr. Kamanji pointed to ILF's ongoing efforts in empowering youth awareness of the justice system and their rights.

Another question directed to Ms. Ahuokpeme asked how traditional and religious leaders are ensuring people adhere to public health guidelines. Ms. Ahuokpeme noted that the Nigerian government did not consult civil society or religious organizations in developing their response-- an approach that did not disseminate information at the grassroots level and led to the politicization of the health crisis. Because "health is a security issue, community engagement is key" to responding and rebuilding effectively.

In the concluding remarks, Mr. Van Sluijs thanked the finalists and participating alumni for their participation in this year's campaign. The Campaign partners aim to follow-up from this event by connecting 2020 campaign finalists with 2019 alumni in an effort facilitate a community of SDG16+ peacebuilders. Partners also plan to stage the next edition of the Voices of SDG16+ Campaign leading up to next year's HLPF.

More information about the Voices of SDG16+ campaign and campaign finalists can be found at <https://voicesofsdg16plus.org>. An archive of video submissions can be found at <https://voicesofsdg16plus.org/videos/>.

