



## HINDU

### BHUMI PROJECT

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present an opportunity for the global community to help address some of the major challenges facing the planet. Ending extreme poverty, achieving gender equality, and addressing climate change are concerns that affect all citizens of the world.

This document outlines how the international Hindu community may contribute to achieving the goals of the SDGs over the next 15 years. Of the 17 SDGs, we have proposed projects for 12 of them which we feel the Hindu community can meaningfully contribute towards.

This Hindu response to the SDGs has been led by the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies and the Bhumi Project, in consultation with leading Hindu figures from across the world. It builds on the work of the Bhumi Project's Nine Year Plan, which was developed and launched in 2009 with support from the Alliance for Religion and Conservation.

With 900 million Hindus worldwide, including up to 15 million in the diaspora, Hindu communities, sampradayas, and sangas could become an important voice in implementing the SDGs. The unique contributions Hindu teachings can make will have benefit well beyond the confines of Hindu traditions, bringing new perspectives to the debate based on Indian concepts of atman, dharma, ahimsa, and sattva, to name a few.

Alongside the other major cultures and faith traditions, Hindus have a responsibility to understand and act on their own teachings regarding care of the planet and its populations.

The challenge faced in developing a Hindu response to anything arises from one of the tradition's strengths – its diversity. There is no church, no single leader or scripture, or no global council to make a pronouncement.

Therefore, not presuming to speak or act for the whole community, we would like to work with its natural diversity by encouraging and inspiring individual and communal creativity.

We ask volunteers from any Hindu background, or none, to help fill our teams, conduct research, offer networks, advice, and expertise. Working together for such a universal cause will be a nurturing experience for all and a positive contribution to our world. This is a living document that will grow and expand with our work. We ask for feedback and suggestions on how we can improve this document and the work we seek to do.

We realise that the projects and ideas outlined in this document will not be able to manifest unless they are sufficiently financed. We therefore ask for financial support and guidance on how we can utilise funds from the Hindu community in this important seva (service).

Through this work we aim to help Hindus and others better understand how Hindu teachings can contribute to addressing challenges the world faces. Through creating cohesion and platforms for cooperation, we hope to create positive working relationships that extend beyond the Hindu community.

We are thankful to the United Nations for inviting a Hindu response to the SDGs. This presents a unique opportunity for the global Hindu community to work together in a way that has never been attempted before. We therefore ask for your blessings that our endeavour will achieve some level of success.

## GOAL 2 - END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

### 2.1

Hindu traditions contain many guidelines on diet and lifestyles. Many of these teachings are now unknown or seen as out-dated. We plan to highlight these teachings and their importance in promoting healthy living. We will conduct research to identify these teachings. The findings from this research would form the basis of a campaign that would highlight the link between diet and good health. A team of health professionals would be created to lead this campaign, to show the alignment between these traditional teachings and current scientific thinking on food nutrition. Initial research for this initiative would take 6 months, this would be followed by another 6 months of consultation with health professionals. Following this, a campaign

with adequate resources would be created over a 3–6 month period. At the end of 10 years this campaign would be shared with a significant number of Hindu organisations internationally, resulting in widespread knowledge of the connection between diet and health within the Hindu community.

### **2.3**

A number of Hindu-based organisations operate food relief initiatives across the world. In India, they feed young children - providing them a meal so that they are able to go to school. In other parts of the world they provide free meals to underprivileged communities. We feel that if such groups were to work together, their combined impact could be much greater than their individual efforts.

We plan to first conduct a survey of all Hindu food relief initiatives worldwide. This would allow us to get a overview of all operations currently active. This would be followed by reviewing the various programs to identify their respective strengths and weaknesses. With such information, we will be in a position to ascertain how collaboration between such groups can be meaningful and impactful.

## **GOAL 3 - ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES**

### **3.1**

Many Hindu temples, ashrams and institutions in India run healthcare facilities. These range from small rural clinics to large city hospitals.

Outside of India, many Hindus work in the healthcare industry as doctors, nurses and consultants. We plan to utilise the extensive experience and resources within the Hindu community to create an international Hindu healthcare initiative. Our aim is to create opportunities for Hindu healthcare professionals and institutions to offer their services for free to underprivileged communities across the world. Our ambition is to create a service similar to the British Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders.

To begin this process, we will identify the leading Hindu-based healthcare initiatives in India. A review will be done of their free health services. This review will include geographic areas served, health issues addressed, and number of patients cared for. Once we have a clear overview, we will promote the opportunity for healthcare professionals worldwide to volunteer with these initiatives. This will be facilitated by a central website where all volunteering opportunities will be searchable. By creating such a facility, we anticipate that many doctors and nurses who work in healthcare outside of India will give their time to help serve those who have limited access to good healthcare

in India. In times of emergency, such a service would facilitate the quick deployment of healthcare professionals in disaster zones.

#### GOAL 4 - ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

##### 4.1

We wish to create forums to learn about the richness of Hindu traditions and cultures to help promote greater global understanding. Through the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies (OCHS), we plan to create a number of online courses which critically engage with Hindu arts, languages, and philosophy. These courses will compliment a number of existing online courses offered by the OCHS on topics that include Hindu engagements with modernity, issues of identity, poetry, history and literature like the great Hindu epics of the Mahabharata and Ramayana. Over the next 10 years we plan to introduce one new course a year.

#### GOAL 5 - ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

##### 5.1

We want to create a global network of Hindu women to be role models for young Hindu women and girls. This would include women from the corporate and political worlds, scientists, and religious leaders. Forums to network and learn from these women will be created, in addition to opportunities for mentorship and leadership training.

The first step in creating this initiative would be to create a book profiling at least 12 high profile Hindu women. The book would make sure to emphasise the Hindu backgrounds of these women, and how their faith helped them to achieve their goals in life. On publication of the book we plan to hold a speaking tour across India, where young girls would be invited to meet some of the women profiled.

In addition, we will identify leading women from Hindu scriptures, traditions, and history. We will look at the Hindu epics of the Mahabharata and Ramayana to find stories of Hindu women that can be positive role models for young women.

Using the experiences of the women profiled in the book, and the stories of Hindu women from scripture, we will create a leadership training program for young women. We will hold events in the major cities of India, creating opportunities for young

women to learn first-hand about how to become leaders of society. By the end of 10 years, we plan for this initiative to be a major catalyst in Hindu communities worldwide in the development of Hindu women to positions of leadership in all spheres of life.

## GOAL 6 - ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

### 6.1

Bodies of water, such as the rivers Ganges and Yamuna, are considered to be sacred according to Hindu teachings. Hindus are encouraged to use water with respect, understanding that it is a resource that nourishes and sustains all life.

We plan to develop resources, campaigns and initiatives to highlight the importance of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in Hindu communities and places of worship. At present, no educational resources exist that show the sacredness of water from a Hindu perspective. We will create a handbook that contains stories from Hind scripture about water, and classroom activities for young children. This handbook would 6 months to produce.

Working with rural communities in India, in conjunction with government bodies and secular organisations, we will conduct training programs on WASH. We will identify one state in India to pilot this work, and review it's success over a year. On completion, we will review our work and expand to other states in India. In 10 years we plan to have worked with rural Hindu communities in every state of India.

## GOAL 11 - MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE

### 11.1

The major cities of the world have considerable numbers of Hindus living and working in the them. We plan to create local, self-governing chapters of the Bhumi Project to promote sustainable lifestyles based on principles of compassion, tolerance and non-violence. The focus would be on initiatives to address waste management and the local sourcing of food.

The groups would meet regularly and conduct training workshops on sustainable living in urban environments. The groups would work with local environmental associations, forming partnerships to further their work.

We will begin this work by creating the first groups in Mumbai, London and New York.

These initial groups would set a good example for other groups to be formed in more cities worldwide.

### **11.2**

Hindu sites of worship and pilgrimage in India often face significant environmental challenges due to increased numbers of pilgrims. We will work with such sites and identify cases of best practice to create a network of clean and green pilgrim sites. With the Green Pilgrimage Network and their Green Temples Initiative we will hold regular workshops and learning opportunities across India. At the end of 10 years, we plan that all major Hindu pilgrimage sites in India are working together, sharing best practice, and implementing high standards of environmental care.

## **GOAL 12 - ENSURE SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION PATTERNS**

### **12.1**

The principle of ahimsa (non-violence) promotes a lifestyle where one is mindful of their actions upon others and the planet. A vegetarian diet is a natural result of such thinking; it is more sustainable and has a lower environmental impact than a diet which includes meat. We thus want to encourage all Hindus to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle where possible.

We will work with international animal welfare organisations to highlight the disconnect between modern animal agriculture and Hindu values. A website will be created that promotes a Hindu approach to caring for animals and encourages a vegetarian lifestyle. This website will also encourage Hindus to buy locally sourced food and grow their own produce where possible.

### **12.2**

During festivals and religious ceremonies, Hindu temples can use significant amounts of flowers, fruits, vegetables and grains. By working with temples and communities we want to show the importance of ensuring such items are locally sourced.

Creating local, national and international networks of Hindu temples and communities, we will facilitate the exchanging of best practice for finding locally sourced produce. We will start with selecting a pilot temple in either England or North America. With them, we will conduct an audit of their current food usage and find how we can ensure a realistic percentage is sourced locally. This pilot temple will be used as model, showing other Hindu temples the benefits - financial, environmental and spiritual - of using food that has been grown locally. We will then expand this scheme to other strategically

chosen temples in different parts of the world.

At the end of 10 years we plan to significantly change the way Hindu temples produce and purchase items used in festivals and worship.

## GOAL 13 - TAKE URGENT ACTION TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS

### 13.1

By training young Hindus in environmental leadership based on Hindu teachings on environmental care, we hope to educate a new generation on the importance of caring for the planet. This year we are piloting an environmental leadership training initiative in India. This week-long program aims to develop young religious environmental leaders in India.

We believe this is the first such program to be created in India. We plan to develop this initiative and create a fully-fledged environmental leadership institute in India with a strong Hindu basis over the next 10 years. This institution will forge links with leading environmental institutions outside of India, such as the Omega Institute in upstate New York, and Schumacher College in England.

### 13.2

We aim to continue the work of the Bhumi Project to reach a greater number of Hindu communities in Europe, Asia Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, and North America. This will be achieved through further developing and promoting our current initiatives. These include Hindu Environment Week, which takes place every February, and our Bhumi Pledge campaign, that reaches out to Hindu students on college campuses. In 10 years time we foresee the Bhumi Project being a significant part of the global Hindu community that inspires and activates Hindus to be leaders in the environmental field.

### 13.3

We will write and circulate Hindu teachings on climate change. This will be an opportunity to make these teachings more accessible and foster greater understanding and cooperation amongst Hindu and other communities. Work on this will begin this year, with the publication of a Hindu declaration on climate change. This declaration will have a far reaching impact, being signed onto by leading Hindu figures and institutions.

We will also write and publish works on Hindu climate thought and action. Drawing on Hindu scripture, and the activities of Hindu communities worldwide, we will share

these widely in print to inspire global action.

In addition, we will create a website that will act as a portal to share stories about Hindus working in cooperation with other communities to address climate change. Through this website Hindu climate activities can connect with each other, share stories and best practice, and inspire each other for further action.

## **GOAL 15 - PROTECT, RESTORE AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE USE OF TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS, SUSTAINABLY MANAGE FORESTS, COMBAT DESERTIFICATION, AND HALT AND REVERSE LAND DEGRADATION AND HALT BIODIVERSITY LOSS**

### **15.1**

The Bhumi Project is currently working to encourage religious communities in India to help protect tigers, lions and elephants. We intend to expand these initiatives by involving greater numbers of religious communities, asking leading religious figures to endorse such work, and developing educational resources.

This work would be part of the environmental leadership institute, as outlined in 13.1.

### **15.2**

Using guidelines for greening places of worship, we want to actively encourage Hindu temples to use sustainable practices in and around their facilities. We will identify and create case studies of existing Hindu temples that employ high levels of sustainable practice. The Green Temple Initiative, part of the Green Pilgrimage Network, will be used as the basis for this work. The Initiative outlines a number of areas a temple should consider to be environmentally-friendly.

## **GOAL 16 - PROMOTE PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL AND BUILD EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS 16.1**

For all we undertake, we will strive to:

1. Consult widely with the global Hindu community
2. Be transparent in our activities, finances, and decision making
3. Build trust and openness with all partners
4. Strive to work with other communities for greater social cohesion

## GOAL 17 - STRENGTHEN THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REVITALISE THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### 17.1

Creating a strong financial foundation will be central in our ability to execute the projects outlined in this document. This will be done by networking and fundraising with a large array of Hindu organisations. We will show the importance of Hindus working together to address international concerns, and our dharma (duty) to be responsible global citizens.

We will also work with government agencies, the business community, and secular organisations to help us realise the goals set out in this document.

### 17.2

We will build capacity in Hindu communities across the world. Focusing on young people, we will educate and train them to be conversant in global issues, and how Hindu teachings can help address those issues. The goals outlined in this document will have strong educational elements to them. In 10 years we plan for the global Hindu community to be actively involved in working to address the aspirations of the SDGs.

### 17.3

Partnerships will be key to our work. We will aim to establish partnerships with:

1. Hindu communities, leaders and institutions
2. Other faith communities
3. Development and environmental organisations
4. Secular organisations and government bodies