



QUAKERS
AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE
RESPONSE TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

July 2015

ENGAGING WITH THE SDG PROCESS

For almost five years, the Quaker UN Office (QUNO <http://www.quno.org/>) in New York, operating closely with AFSC (<http://afsc.org/>) and QUNO Geneva, has been focused on upholding the key importance of peace issues within the global framework for the Sustainable Development Goals. The majority of the world's poorest people are situated in fragile and conflict-affected societies, and it is in these environments that the traditional MDG approaches have largely failed. From the beginning of the current process it has been clear that it is imperative to address the issues of peaceful and inclusive societies in order to eliminate extreme poverty and support the growth of resilient societies. QUNO also worked to include these issues into the Addis outcome document.

QUNO expects to continue to engage with member states, UN officials and civil society actors in working on the implementation of the SDGs, particularly the issues of peace and inclusion. This may include work at the UN level on financing, coordination, prioritization, and mechanisms for governance and accountability.

In addition to UNDP's commitment to peaceful societies, AFSC is pleased to note that the UNDP 2013 strategy is aligned with AFSC regarding the mainstreaming of social and political issues into development objectives. Traditional development outcomes (poverty reduction) are now understood to be inextricably linked to issues such as political inclusion, rule of law, inequality, conflict prevention, stronger institutions and governance.

AFSC is also heartened to see UNDP defining served communities in terms of

inequalities and exclusion. This perhaps echoes some of the thinking that AFSC has been doing in searching for the language to universalise its focus on underprivileged communities in the US so that it feels equally applicable to international work.

Reference documents;

AFSC Strategic Plan <http://afsc.org/document/afsc-strategic-plan>

AFSC & FCNL Publication Shared Security; Reimagining US Foreign Policy
https://sharedsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/shared-security_v8-for-distribution.pdf

Implementing the SDGs

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

The work of AFSC contributes to a number of the SDGs, including 10, 11 and 17, but goal 16 is where AFSC and the SDGs are aligned, and all the work of AFSC contributes towards this goal. AFSC is not driven by the SDG agenda, as the organisation has its own process for discerning work with Quaker committees. AFSC does not plan work as far into the future as 2025 either – the current strategy is 2014 – 2018. However AFSC will always be committed and guided by the Quaker testimonies to peace and equality, as has been the case since 1917.

AFSC Vision

The American Friends Service Committee envisions a world in which lasting peace with justice is achieved through active nonviolence and the transforming power of love. We work toward a world in which:

- All persons affirm the common good and recognize our mutual interdependence;
- Societies steward resources equitably;
- Caring, respectful economic development, including work with dignity, promotes well-being for all;
- Communities and societies fractured by exclusion and marginalization are healed and transformed, embracing inclusion and equality;
- Conflicts are resolved through restorative means and without force or coercion; and
- Governments and societal institutions are fair and accountable

As stated in the AFSC strategy, the mission, vision and values focus on overcoming exclusion and countering violence within the frame of achieving peace with justice. To that end, international and U.S. Executive Committees and staff will proactively seek program opportunities in the following areas of focus:

- AFSC will work with constituencies that have suffered exclusion and marginalization. We will focus particularly on communities or societies where exclusion or oppression exists along dimensions such as ethnicity, race, gender, class, religion, sexual identity, age, physical disability, or ideology.
- We will direct programs toward communities that suffer deeply as a result of violence or militarism, where alternative nonviolent approaches can offer hope for positive change.
- We will continue our commitment to working with young people, especially those robbed of their potential by conditions in their communities.
- In addition, we will maintain efforts in geographic areas or addressing issues of concern that represent other long-term Quaker commitments.

In describing such priorities around certain communities or populations, AFSC continues to recognize that we will engage with all actors— those who are perceived as powerful and privileged and those who are perceived as less powerful or privileged— to effect needed changes in policies, institutions, and structures.

AFSC is focusing work on two strategic initiatives. To quote from the AFSC strategy;

The first initiative offers direct engagement with conflict on the ground. By working with individuals, especially young people and their allies, in communities beset by violence and injustice, we will demonstrate the social transformations that are possible through nonviolent collective action and build the capacity for peace at the individual, school, and community levels. This work will inform and support the second initiative in its efforts to change the situations and systems that cause violence. By building on our strengths and experiences, this approach aligns with the program development principle within the Guidelines for Program Design and Program Choice: “When undertaking efforts to change structures and policies, ensure that these are grounded in direct experience working to change the personal circumstances of individuals and communities.”

The second initiative challenges the narrative that promotes militarism and coercion as necessary for security. This initiative will require working in partnership with like-minded organizations to offer alternatives to economic and social systems grounded in

violence and to build recognition that reallocating military resources to peaceful endeavors is likely to increase global security. To change the dominant narrative that “war works,” it will be necessary to offer more than facts and logic, but also to address the emotional and biological underpinnings of conflict. By building on the growing body of research in the social and biological sciences on the causes and consequences of violence, we can apply new insights into the possible cultural, environmental, and biological factors affecting the propensity to resort to violence and war. This initiative can also draw in the young activists from the first initiative as advocates for and practitioners of nonviolence.