



The Nelson Mandela Project For Social Change

Introduction

The Nelson Mandela Project for Social Change is a visionary initiative aimed at strengthening social capital for consensus building and facilitating dialogue to promote participatory forms of governance at national and international levels.

Against the backdrop of the UN Secretary General's "Our Common Agenda" Report, the project focuses on ways to build shared values and trust-based relations between people and institutions through the collection, dissemination and application of knowledge

The Project's philosophy is anchored in **Nelson Mandela's fundamental leadership insights**: promoting a culture of value based and adaptive leadership, resilience, and empathy, and reflecting a determination to create a genuine and safe dialogue space to foster social change.

For purposes of the Nelson Mandela Project, **social change** is defined as a process of transforming patterns of thought, behaviour, social relations and institutions with the aim of more equitable, inclusive and peaceful societies.

Social change leadership is defined as action taken at the individual, institutional and societal level, aiming at inducing social transformation. Social change leadership is context driven, value-based and adaptive, taking into account influences and interests of different actors.

The founding partners of this project include the **UN System Staff College (UNSSC)** along with **five academic partners**. Since its creation, two additional universities have joined the initiative, bringing the core member group to eight academic institutions. Through building coalitions and strengthening capabilities for social change, the project will ultimately help to accelerate efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to build the basis for a more ambitious reform of the multilateral system.

Background and Rationale

In a world marked by polarisation, increasingly fragile social contracts and systemic power asymmetries, there is a need to strengthen ways for people and institutions to collaborate towards societal transformation. Fuelled by narratives based on nationalism, racial and gender supremacy and economic dominance, trust in national and international institutions has been eroding. Social contracts that provide stability by defining rights and obligations, are becoming more fragile in many societies and thereby also negatively impact solidarity among countries.

The United Nations was established as a symbol of multilateralism to unite the world against poverty, insecurity, injustice, and inequality. This sets the UN in an ideal position to assist in the restoration of a common vision for humanity on a healthy planet.

Objectives

The overall aim of the Nelson Mandela Project for Social Change is to co-create a learning journey towards systems transformation by:

1. **Strengthening Social Capital:** Enhance trust, networks, and shared values within and between communities to foster cooperation and collective action.
2. **Promoting Consensus Building:** Develop frameworks and platforms that encourage dialogue and mutual understanding amongst diverse stakeholders.
3. **Facilitating Participatory Governance:** Increase the capacity of communities and institutions to engage in participatory decision-making processes.
4. **Fostering Social Change Leadership:** Promote leadership that drives social transformation, taking into account the influences and interests of various actors in different contexts.

Key Components

Collection of Knowledge:

- Identify individuals and groups engaged in social change.
- Compile research and case studies relevant to social change and consensus building.
- Identify and document effective approaches and methods used to promote consensus building.

Dissemination of Knowledge:

- Organize seminars, conferences, and symposia.
- Create networking opportunities and a series of podcasts.
- Publish findings and methodologies to reach a wider audience.

Application of Knowledge:

- Develop learning offerings, training programmes, and certification programs.
- Focus on building the capacities of decision-makers, civil society activists, youth, and UN personnel.

Initial Activities

The project targets decision makers, civil society activists, youth and UN personnel. Its activities foster social innovation through co-creative knowledge sharing and learning. Initial deliverables focus on:

- a) Forging an informal UN-backed network and community of practice through the creation of **regional hubs**.
- b) Establishing the **Nelson Mandela Global Academy for Social Change Leadership** to serve as a centre of excellence in fostering social change leadership.

a. Nelson Mandela Regional Hubs:

The partnering universities will work as hubs anchoring regional perspectives and specific activities. They will be focal points for regional ecosystems for social change, convening regional communities of practice and facilitating the production of knowledge products. The academic institutions will provide a local lens to the analysis and discussion of global drivers, disruptors, public policies on social change, and specific issues that threaten to divide local, regional and global societies.

b. Nelson Mandela Global Academy for Social Change:

The Nelson Mandela Global Academy for Social Change is formed by a global cohort of changemakers with a track record in social innovation, sustainable development leadership and other aspects related to systems transformation towards positive social change. The six-months, semi-academic programme will be conducted online on an annual basis through regular online classes and workshops with a final rotating face-to-face gathering in one of the participating universities.

Conclusion

The Nelson Mandela Project for Social Change aspires to build a more cohesive, understanding, and participatory society by leveraging the power of social capital and dialogue. By fostering trust, promoting consensus building, and facilitating inclusive governance, this project aims to build a legacy of peace, development and cooperation that honours Nelson Mandela's enduring contributions to humanity.