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# Sustainable Development Programme

## Building citizenship to leave no one behind: Improving health, equality and identity to promote sustainable human development

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### Executive summary

The British Academy's *Sustainable Development Programme* funds world-class research aimed at addressing the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and advancing the UK's Aid Strategy. This brief discusses the findings of projects in the *Sustainable Human Development* thematic area of the programme, which provide important lessons for policymaking. It suggests ways to ensure that no one is left behind in the sustainable development agenda as a result of ill health, socio-economic inequalities or discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or disability. It posits that providing universal health care can be an effective strategy for increasing the employment and income of poor people, potentially reducing their dependence on cash transfer programmes. It also suggests that enabling active citizenship and mobilised communities who can claim their rights and hold their governments accountable to implement the SDGs is a key strategy for building inclusive societies which promote human development. Furthermore, the brief argues that education efforts, initiatives to enhance collective identity and political capacity-building are indispensable steps towards sustainable human development. NGOs and social movements can play a key role in these efforts, and should be supported. Finally, it suggests that dialogue with local communities can help to explore innovative and holistic ways to connect development projects with social and cultural aspects of people's identity.

### Introduction

The British Academy's 2016 *Sustainable Development Programme* funds world-class research aimed at addressing the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and advancing the UK's Aid Strategy. The [16 interdisciplinary research projects](#) funded by this programme provide

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important evidence geared towards informing policies and interventions aimed at improving people's lives in developing countries, by reducing poverty and advancing socio-economic development. The programme has thus far supported research projects in three core areas: *Sustainable Governance*, *Sustainable Growth* and *Sustainable Human Development*. This brief discusses the findings of the projects in the *Sustainable Human Development* thematic area and puts forward key lessons for policymaking.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) build on and complement the earlier Millennium Development Goals. They consist of 17 goals and 169 targets, based on the understanding that eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. Aspects covered by the SDGs are ending poverty and hunger, combating inequality, building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, protecting human rights, promoting gender equality, protecting the planet and its resources, and promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth which leaves no one behind.

As the latest UNDP Human Development Report states, human development is about enabling people around the world to realise the full potential of their lives. The report also recognises that inequalities and discrimination against poor and marginalised groups, including migrants, refugees, ethnic minorities and women, deny many people the opportunities for full human development.<sup>i</sup> The SDGs similarly recognise that rising inequalities are a major challenge to sustainable development, therefore calling for a just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.

Different projects funded by the British Academy's 2016 *Sustainable Development Programme* have worked with marginalised people in order to improve understanding of how they can be better included in order to achieve development that 'leaves no one behind'. Health plays an important role in this, as is described in the first section of this brief. Ageing and migration can lead to some groups being left behind by development, which is discussed in the second section. The final section of the brief describes strategies to engage marginalised groups in holding their governments accountable for failing to promote sustainable inclusion.

## Health and well-being

***Universal health care provision can reduce government spending on poverty reduction by increasing workers' productivity and income.***

Three projects in the British Academy's 2016 *Sustainable Development Programme* explore the relation between health and development. This is especially relevant in the context of SDG 3, which calls for ensuring healthy lives and for promoting well-being at all ages, including through access to health care. The project **Welfare Dependence and Poverty Traps: Evaluating the Contribution of Health Shocks and Health Policy**

uses linked administrative data sets to estimate the causal impacts of public health provision on poverty. It draws on individual data from Brazil's welfare register, which tracks up to 60 million individuals over time on a monthly basis, recording their employment, earnings and receipt of transfers. Brazil is an interesting laboratory for this analysis since it provides universal health coverage and has a large cash transfer programme. The timing of this data matches the opening of primary public health care facilities in Rio de Janeiro. Project results show that the opening of such facilities has increased the employment and incomes of women in the informal sector, where employers do not provide any public health insurance. It thus seems that improved health increases workers' productivity and therefore their income. These findings are relevant to policy-makers interested in the ongoing global debates on the sustainability of cash transfer programmes, as they suggest that the efficiency of government spending on

poverty reduction through welfare programmes can be enhanced through investments in public health provision, in particular through providing universal health care. This can be especially important among women, because not only are they often in less good health, but they are also the carers for family members in poor health.

The project '**The Last 100 Metres': Safeguarding Potable Water Provisioning to Urban Informal Settlements (L100M)** also addresses health, specifically in response to SDG 6 which calls for the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Safe drinking water is an essential element for promoting health, especially for children and their development, which in turn is crucial for economic growth. L100M shows that safe water is not just a technical issue. In spite of efforts to bring safe water to informal settlements in Bangladesh, through the replacement of hanging latrines by community toilets and the installation of community water points, the level of diarrhoeal diseases among young children has grown rather than reduced. Various factors explain this. Unsafe drinking water is partly related to – the lack of – urban planning. In the extremely densely populated slums in Bangladesh, water infrastructure quickly gets damaged by being used far beyond its capacity. Well-vegetated buffer zones disappear in quickly growing slums, which further increases contamination. Finally, toilets and water points are often built together, increasing contamination risks. Improved urban planning could thus help to prevent these problems. This is, however, only part of the solution.

***To improve water quality, technical improvements should be combined with public education campaigns to raise public and political awareness about the importance of safe water and sanitation for health and development.***

An additional problem to be overcome is the lack of safe sanitation. The use of dirty buckets, unwashed hands and open defecation (especially by young children) are important contaminating factors. Although relatively safer water comes out of the collection units inside slum communities, in the last 100 metres (a metaphor referring to the small space around people's homes) where water is manually carried from the collection unit into people's houses, it becomes contaminated and unsafe to drink. Increasing the capacity of water dispensing facilities is not enough, which highlights the need for an integrated approach to improving water quality. The project found that education about safe sanitation, together with check-ups and fixing of toilets and septic tanks, reduced water contamination by 70%. It is, however, unclear if these results are sustainable. The researchers, therefore, argue for an annual repetition of these efforts, which they have termed the 'WASH vaccine'. International policy-makers could integrate this WASH vaccine in their interventions, and use it to raise awareness among governments and the general public in developing countries about the importance of better sanitation and safer water for health and human development. Increased understanding of the effects of contaminated water can save millions of lives.<sup>ii</sup>

Also related to health and well-being, the project **Improving Children's Life Chances in High-Risk, Low-Income Settings** focuses specifically on the development of children in challenging circumstances. A thorough understanding of children's development is essential for designing effective policies to help the hundreds of millions of children who are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential in high-risk and low-income settings. Although it is increasingly recognised by researchers and practitioners that urgent action is needed to protect these children, at present there is insufficient knowledge to design comprehensive policy

***Better understanding of the different stages of children's development is needed to design comprehensive interventions to better protect the millions of children who are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential in high-risk and low-income settings.***

interventions. This project has, therefore, developed a methodology for a much-needed longitudinal cohort study to increase understanding about children's development. This study aims to follow a cohort of children across time, in order to test which interventions for improving children's development are successful at different stages, from pre-conception to adulthood. The project entails the development of a set of free to use measurement tools, to allow for the design of more effective policy interventions. These tools will consider the role of different inputs and domains in children's developmental stages, ranging from nutritional status, vaccination and sanitation, to mental health and stimulation.

## **Cultural identity, sustainable tourism and economic growth**

Human development is not possible if people do not have the economic freedom to pursue their own life plans. SDG 8, therefore, calls for enhancing economic growth and full and productive employment and decent work for all. It also highlights the opportunities of creating jobs and promoting local cultures and products through sustainable tourism.

This is a theme addressed by the project [Living Amid the Ruins: Archaeological Sites as Hubs of Sustainable Development for Local Communities in Southwest Turkey \(LAR\)](#), which explores how sustainable economic growth and social and human development can be encouraged by building on existing assets, such as cultural and archaeological heritage. The ancient region of Pisidia in southwestern Turkey faces the challenges of an ageing population, rising unemployment and the migration of young people to cities (92.3% of the Turkish population lives in cities). Ageing and migration – in Turkey as well as in many other parts of the world - risk creating ever larger inequalities between cities and countryside, which can threaten local cultural identity and natural and historical treasures. The Pisidia region hosts many archaeological sites, which have great social and economic potential, but are currently in danger because of looting and the destruction of the surrounding landscapes as a result of mining. [LAR](#) explores ways to protect these heritage sites through ecotourism and by building stronger connections between the local communities and the heritage sites they live close to.<sup>iii</sup> Using these sites to increase economic development can in turn contribute to reversing the trend of migration.

***Policies to promote sustainable tourism based on archaeological sites could be a way to conserve cultural heritage, promote economic growth, and thus counter trends of migration and ageing populations.***

To achieve these goals, the British Institute at Ankara (BIAA) Cultural Heritage Management Project (on which the LAR research builds) developed a long-distance hiking trail. This marked 350 km Pisidia Heritage Trail is accompanied by a guidebook that offers information on local culture, traditions and plant use. The same project also designed 3D virtual reality applications to allow hikers and other visitors to experience the sites as if they are standing in the shoes of people living

in antiquity.<sup>iv</sup> In this way, the BIAA Cultural Heritage Management project and **LAR** together creatively combine the social, cultural and economic potential of heritage sites to help promoted sustainable development.

**LAR** asked the communities involved what benefits they hoped to receive. Surprisingly, economic benefits are not the only motivation for the surrounding communities to protect existing archaeological heritage. Some communities are mostly interested in learning about the history and significance of the sites as a way of strengthening their cultural identity. For others, the economic aspect is indeed crucial, due to a lack of alternative economic activities. LAR prepared a short documentary in which people from the villages expressed their views. Based on the results of this research, training on entrepreneurship is being designed for the two participating communities. Workshops on marketing locally produced products to tourists are intended to encourage the communities to use their resources more efficiently, while at the same time increasing women's role in economic development.

## Inclusion, equality and citizenship

SDG 16 is of utmost importance for human development, since it calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. This underpins the other SDGs, including the core goals of combating poverty (SDG 1) and reducing inequality (SDG 10). Building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions and ensuring responsive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels is essential for this, and entails an active role for citizens in the decisions made regarding sustainable development. Nevertheless, local and structural power dynamics often prevent marginalised groups from being included in decision-making and therefore from sharing in the benefits of development. This is the case for many minorities, often considered a statistically insignificant group in developing countries. Social norms that silence people because of their ethnicity, gender, class, sexual preference or disability can also make certain groups invisible in government statistics and policies. Providing forums for such marginalised people to present their everyday experiences of poverty and exclusion and propose ways forward, and supporting them in building capacities to do this, are crucial steps to ensuring that sustainable development benefits everyone meaningfully.

The project **Building Sustainable Inclusion: From Intersecting Inequalities to Accountable Relationships** examines how intersecting inequalities drive poverty and shape inequitable lives. Since inequalities and power structures are context-specific, this project collaborates with highly marginalised populations in India, Uganda, South Africa, Egypt and Ghana to understand how best to navigate constraining power relations in order to build pathways towards accountability. Working with civil society partners, the project uses participatory action research to support marginalised groups in analysing and monitoring the SDGs themselves, and build their capacities to hold policy-makers to account.

For example, in an area of rural Ghana it was largely unnoticed that women were those most affected by private sector-led depletion of a salt lagoon. This reduced their income, and as a result also the budget for their children's education. At the same time, this led to a loss in women's social standing in their communities. Participatory community radio, using culturally-appropriate methods such as song and dance, helped to diminish tensions and start public debates on these issues, placing women on traditional and formal authorities' agendas.<sup>v</sup> Visual story-telling, participatory video, community drama and social media campaigns can also provide important tools for raising awareness about inequalities and discrimination. They can contribute to building collective identities and creating solidarities between different groups, such as women, the elderly, and people with disabilities or HIV/Aids. Boosting people's rights awareness, confidence and skills can in turn empower them to express their experiences of poverty, inequality and marginalisation,

and communicate their proposals for change to policy-makers. Claiming rights by working together as a collective makes it more likely that demands will be heard, legitimised and responded to. This bottom-up pressure can help push for more inclusive policies.

It is important to understand that the SDGs are often far removed from the everyday reality of those living in poverty. Organisations that work with marginalised groups can play a key role as intermediaries. They provide information, offer safe spaces for people to come together and build capacities for political engagement. Policies to support this work are essential, as facing resistance or rejection can be demotivating and risks making people apathetic. Empowering people can lead to the creation of social movements across marginalised groups, which can help strengthen claims and mitigate the risks of social mobilising.<sup>vi</sup> Constant awareness is needed of the local and structural power dynamics at play, which require reflective and adaptive responses. Enabling everyone to claim their rights and make their voices heard in relationships of accountability that go beyond one-off consultations will contribute to more accountable institutions. This will better foster human development for all, leaving no one behind. To guarantee this, freedom of expression is of the utmost importance. Independent media can play an important role in this, by providing information that is often inaccessible via official channels, by enabling marginalised groups to express their perspectives and claim an influencing role in public dialogue.

***Giving marginalised groups a forum to present their everyday experiences of poverty and exclusion, and propose ways out of these, is a crucial step to ensuring that sustainable development benefits everyone.***

## Conclusion

The findings of the research projects in the *Sustainable Human Development* thematic area of the British Academy's 2016 *Sustainable Development Programme* shed light on the interconnection of the diverse aspects of human development, including health, discrimination and cultural identity. They provide important insights for policy-makers and practitioners seeking to devise policies that promote human development:

- Governments must guarantee the freedoms needed for sustainable human development, making sure that no one is left behind as a result of ill health, socio-economic inequalities or discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or disability, among other factors.
- Health is crucial for combating poverty. Providing universal health care can be an effective strategy to increase the employment and income of poor people, eventually reducing their dependence on cash transfer programmes.
- Access to safe water is vital for health. This can be improved through combining access to safe water with information and awareness-raising on safe sanitation and guaranteeing safe sanitation conditions – the so-called WASH vaccine.
- Policy-makers should think creatively about how to build on local cultural and archaeological heritage to design policies that both increase economic growth through tourism and protect cultural heritage and the environment.
- Marginalised communities should be supported to hold governments to account. Public education and awareness-raising are crucial, as well as building collective identities and strengthening capacities for political engagement.
- Better understanding locally defined needs can help to explore innovative ways to connect development projects with the social and cultural aspects of people's identity. This enables a more holistic view of sustainable development.

- NGOs, civil society organisations and social movements are important intermediaries who promote the SDGs, helping also to overcome the everyday barriers to community and political participation. Governments must protect civic spaces and create an adequate environment for NGOs and social movements that work with people, supporting them in organising and driving their own initiatives.

*For more information about the 2016 Sustainable Development Programme, visit <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/sustainable-development-2016> or email [gcrf@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:gcrf@thebritishacademy.ac.uk)*

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<sup>i</sup> UNDP (2016), 'Human Development Report 2016'.

<sup>ii</sup> Roy, M. (2017), 'A Good Job – Unfinished? How Faecal Contamination of Drinking Water in the 'Last 100 Metres' Hurts the Urban Poor', Presentation at The Daily Star Newspaper Roundtable.

<sup>iii</sup> Gürsu, I. (2017), 'Living Amid the Ruins Project: Investigating the Relationship between Archaeology and the Public', doi: 10.18866/biaa2017.07.

<sup>iv</sup> Vandeput, L. (2017), 'Cultural Heritage Management in Southwestern Asia Minor: on Track!', doi: 10.18866/biaa2017.08.

<sup>v</sup> Participate (2017), 'Using Knowledge from the Margins to Meet the SDGs: The Real Data Revolution', Policy Briefing 03.

<sup>vi</sup> Participate (2017), 'Participatory Accountability for the SDGs: Beyond Social Accountability', Policy Briefing 04.