

## Utilization of Social Capital for Sustainable Development and Peacebuilding in Global Conflict Zones by Faith-Based Movements

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### **Abstract**

*Sustainable development is a pattern of resource use which tries to meet human needs without dramatically harming the environment so that future generation can also benefit from these resources. In other words, sustainable development combines “concern for the carrying capacity of the natural systems with the social challenges facing humanity”.<sup>2</sup> Sustainable development is conceptually broken into three parts: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and socio-political sustainability or the simultaneous pursuit of economic prosperity, environmental quality and social equity. This paper focuses on how volunteer organizations can contribute to social equity and also economic prosperity in multi-ethnic societies and global conflict zones. Civil society can play a positive role in maintaining sustainable peace as civil society is a critical space where diversity and pluralism could be cherished and fostered. Social network of informed and responsible citizens furthers pluralism, democracy and peacebuilding. The study is based on a case documenting how faith-based movements can effectively utilize and direct social capital in order to achieve and/or maintain sustainable development and peace.*

### **Key Words**

*Sustainable Development, Social Capital, Peacebuilding, Structural Prevention, Social Movements, Civil Society*

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2 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable\\_development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development)

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## **Introduction: Essential Need for Social Equity and Fairer Society for Sustainable Development**

An important contribution of peace studies is the emphasis on structural analysis of a conflict (Galtung 1969) as a means of identifying underlying causes of social inequity and discrimination in society (Abu-Nimer 2003: 16). The question “Should conflict prevention address only the immediate causes of conflict or also its underlying roots, or both?” focuses on the root causes of conflict and is often phrased in terms of ‘light versus deep prevention’ (see Miall 2000) or ‘operational (also direct or proximate) and structural prevention’ (see Annan 1999). Deep or structural prevention is related to eliminating the root causes of conflict and there is almost a “consensus in the literature that the deep-rooted causes of conflict must also be addressed” (Hampson, 2002). Structural prevention “incorporates measures that facilitate governance, adherence to human rights, and economic, political, and societal stability, as well as civil society building” (Ackermann 2003: 341, see also Annan 1999; Miall, Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 1999). In other words, “(t)he ability to maintain a stable peace hinges on a country’s abilities to construct well-functioning political institutions and vibrant civil society” (Gizelis 2009: 505). An active civil society can create social capital, that is, trust, cooperation over ethnic, religious, and other divisions, inclusiveness, and open debate which is conducive to peace and harmony between sections of society (see Putnam 1993). Interaction over ethnic and religious boundaries and inclusiveness in ways of organizing and associating can serve to prevent violence (Varshney 2002). Civil society can play a positive role in maintaining sustainable peace as civil society is a critical space where diversity and pluralism could be cherished and fostered (Hampson 1996: 7, Peck 1998). Social network of informed and responsible citizens furthers pluralism, democracy and peacebuilding.

In recent decades, there has been a growing realization of the damage to the environment and a widening global gap between the rich and the poor. It is becoming more obvious that the way the modern world develops is not sustainable. Sustainable development is a way to improve our quality of life while living within our environmental limits and ensuring a fair society.<sup>3</sup> A United Kingdom government document unequivocally states that rich and poor worlds cannot co-exist without dramatic consequences. According to the document, in 2000, states facing stability challenges contained over 1.2 billion people living on less than one dollar a day, and 65 million of the 114 million children of primary school age who did not attend school (Defra 2005: 139). In the past, efforts have concentrated on dealing with consequences of instability and responding to crises but more effective responses to reduce instability and prevent crises are possible. Long-term sustained investment in boosting country capacity and resilience to manage risks and deal with shocks in ways which boost rather than undermine natural and human capital are the

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3 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/>

essence of crisis prevention. As countries that are democratic, respecting human rights of and are responsive to the needs of their people are more likely to achieve sustainable development, the focus should be on promoting human rights, democracy and good political, environmental and economic governance (Defra 2005: 139). Encouraging civil society and broader public participation in decision-making; promoting freedom of information; and promoting access to justice and the rule of law are also essential in conflict prevention and thereby sustainable development endeavours (Defra 2005: 139).

A cycle of degradation and poverty, with a consequent lack of community pride, poor environmental quality and health, high crime and unemployment levels, and multiple inequalities are grave dangers for sustainable communities where deprived communities and socially excluded groups experience poor quality of life, including poor local environmental quality and poor access to services such as education, healthcare and transport.<sup>4</sup> Sustainable communities are inclusive, tolerant, cohesive and fair for everyone, including those in other communities.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in the way towards establishing and maintaining sustainable development priority is given to sustainable consumption and production; climate change and energy; natural resource protection and environmental enhancement; and creating sustainable communities and a fairer world, tackling economic, environmental and social inequalities by providing opportunities for everyone to fulfil their potential. The importance of education and human capital formation is highlighted in the "Human Development Reports" of the United Nations Development Programme as variables, determining positively the development outcome. But, neo-liberalists would caution against such conclusions as "public education expenditures are still public expenditures, and in the long run public education expenditures might negatively affect the development chances of a society, not because they are education expenditures, but because they are still public expenditures. Thus, it is argued that privatization would be important political steps to achieve a more viable development" (Tausch 2003: 10). From this perspective, the activities of the faith-based movements gain importance as they are volunteer civil society movements and their educational and charity projects do not cost anything to the public purse. These movements utilize their social capital, without any cost to the host states, to help realize their citizens' full potential by offering them educational services. To understand these dynamics, we now need to look at the concept of social capital, if very briefly.

### **Utilization of Social Capital for a More Trusting and Equitable Society**

Social scientific attempts to capture the importance of human relationships for sustainability of communities and societies have focused on the concept of "social capital." The concept was highlighted in the 1970s in the works of Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman

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4 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/what/priority/sustainable-communities/index.htm>

5 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/what/priority/sustainable-communities/what-makes.htm>

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(Bourdieu 1983, Coleman 1988). Bourdieu used the term to refer to the advantages and opportunities that people accrue, stemming from their membership of certain communities. Coleman used the term to describe a resource of individuals that emerges from their social ties and relations (Bourdieu 1983). In other words, Bourdieu and Coleman utilized the concept as an analytical tool to describe the added economic and social value of relationships (Morrow 2006, 66). The work of Robert Putnam on the importance of social relations and networks of trust for the successful functioning of the economies of Northern Italy was also influential. Putnam underlined the “features of social organization, such as trust, norms [of reciprocity] and networks [for civic engagement] that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam 2000, 66). Putnam’s work argued that basic attributes of human relationships – the presence or absence of trust, the expectation of reciprocity and the existence of networks – make a critical difference to both the sustainable quality of life of whole societies and to their economic sustainability. His work shows that a sense of belonging and the concrete experience of social networks bring tangible benefits to communities including lower crime rates, better health, higher educational achievement and better economic growth. The norm of trust and reciprocity create social pressure for participation and responsibility and the experience of trust and reciprocity means that the transaction costs of doing business were reduced to a minimum while the activity of joining encourages civic virtues like tolerance, less cynicism and more empathy (Morrow 2000, 67). “Setting aside generalizations about civilization and top-down emphases on markets and elections, the new paradigm stressed the importance of grassroots initiatives for building democracy. There were many variations, but perhaps the most influential was Robert Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work: Civic Institutions in Modern Italy* (1993). He argued that civil society and social capital are “the key to making democracy work” (Putnam 1993, 185). Drawing on the theoretical concept developed earlier by Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman, Putnam defined social capital as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, which can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam 1993, 167). Putnam’s main thesis was that it was in these voluntary, “horizontal” networks that citizens develop the trust, cooperative skills, and egalitarian attitudes required for democracy (Hefner 2005, 16). However, “the idea that all civil society associations and all social capital are “good” for democracy runs up against one unnerving complication: social capital can be used for all manner of ends, including antidemocratic ones” (Hefner 2005, 16). Thus, Putnam introduced a qualification on his earlier argument in 2000 in a study of social capital in the USA. Recognizing that not all social capital is democracy—or pluralism—friendly, he distinguished an exclusive or bonding social capital from an inclusive or bridging variant (Putnam 2000, 22–23). Bridging social capital tends to “generate broader identities and reciprocity” (Putnam 2000, 23).

The faith-based movement that we study in this paper –the Turkish Schools Movement inspired by Turkish Muslim scholar Fethullah Gülen– successfully turned its spiritual, intellectual and human resources into effective social capital and utilized this

social capital in establishing educational institutions from primary school to university levels attracting students of diverse backgrounds (Kucukcan 2007: 187). The movement has also mobilized its social capital “to establish civil society organizations such as foundations and associations to promote democratic participation and dialogue among various sections of the society such as Abant Meetings which successfully brought together many intellectuals and activists from different backgrounds both in Turkey and outside to discuss local and global issues” (Kucukcan 2007: 188). Abant Platform is an “example of a religiously inspired social capital formation in a society with ideological, ethnic and religious fault lines” (Ugur 2007: 155). The movement has been successful in employing its social capital to empower the civil society and to expand the democratic space available for the periphery (Ugur 2007: 155). A critical contribution of Abant in Turkey is the empowerment of the civil society vis-à-vis the state (Ugur 2007: 155). Thus, “a more informed, educated and cohesive public have already started to emerge, which in turn developed a self-esteem for challenging the state in matters of democracy, freedoms and the rule of law. The open dialogue and reconciliation that takes place in Abant demystifies social problems that were seen as intractable. This in turn depoliticizes social problems. And paradoxically, depoliticisation opens more space for the political society against the resentment of the state bureaucracy to reform” (Ugur 2007: 162). In the global arena, the movement employs a similar inclusive discourse with regards to several different religious, ethnic and ideological groups and claims to promote the religio-national interest of the host country (Ugur 2007: 155).

### **Educational Initiatives' Role in Sustainable Development in Multi-Ethnic Societies and Global Conflict Zones**

Educational institutions can foster sustainable development by bridging international values with local values and cultures; by capacity-building, preparing professionals to foster a sustainable future and by creating public spaces through civil society associations (Vargas 2000: 377-396). In this context, the movement has been able to convert its social network and spiritual capital into creative, especially educational, projects (Kucukcan 2007: 187). The movement provides intermediary networks that contribute to the integration of individual citizens to state (Özdalga 2005: 433).

In the movement's worldview, there are three major enemies of Muslims and also entire humanity: ignorance, poverty and disunity. Thus, the movement endeavors a concrete socio-economic and cultural analysis of the current spatio-temporal context and based on this analysis offers concrete solutions to tackle Muslims' enemies rather than insisting on abstract rhetoric. If ignorance is one of three major enemies, then the movement's offer would be education at different levels, not only at schools or not only religious education. The movement's educational projects cover almost all major stages of life. It is not only confined to mosque nor is it only confined to secular schools. It also includes family education, child upbringing, educating religious scholars, educating by

example and not only in classrooms etc. If poverty is Muslims' second enemy, then the movement's offer would be establishing poverty relief and humanitarian aid charity organizations in addition to education's indirect help to lift people's socio-economic status See in detail (Michel 2008). If dissention or internal conflict is the third major enemy, then, dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding are the remedies to tackle this conflict. As can be seen, the movement's major projects all focus on either of these three areas and the movement's media organizations play also supporting roles in this global civil activism (See in detail Yilmaz 2008).

Today in Turkey, Central Asia and many other parts of the world, the movement's educational institutions contribute to the education of people of different religions and ethnicities and they have "already contributed, through educational endeavors, to the building of peace in many areas of conflict, including the Balkans, northern Iraq, Northern Ireland, and the Philippines" (Saritoprak 2007: 636).

Mehmet Kalyoncu's work on the multi-ethnic Turkish city Mardin shows that the movement "has succeeded in forging policies and programmes that bring different ethno-religious communities together as a necessary first step towards civil society: common problems facing the different ethno-religious communities are identified, then solid services to address those problems are provided, requiring collaborative effort by the different ethno-religious communities. In this way the social potential of those communities is mobilised and channelled to achieve shared goals which enrich the society as a whole" (Kalyoncu 2007: 597). Moreover, the movement has not only mobilized Turks, but also Kurds, Arabs, and Assyrian Christians in the city to cooperate on challenging their common problems such as the ensuing insecurity, infrastructural and socio-economic deprivations resulting from the clashes the Turkish security forces and the terrorist organizations such as the Marxist PKK and the pro-violence radical Islamist Hizbullah, that also deepened the ethnic and to lesser extent religious fault-lines (Kalyoncu 2007: 599). In this socio-political and economic context, the movement has encouraged people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds to establish educational, cultural and civic institutions that have changed the attitudes and practices of the ethno-religious groups in Mardin (Kalyoncu 2007: 599). The educational institutions run by Turks, Arabs, and Kurds together have minimized, if not eradicate, the perception of Turk-Kurd enmity through which PKK has garnered popular support. These institutions, be they college preparation courses or reading halls, took the unemployed youth off the streets, who constituted otherwise the main recruitment resource for both PKK and Hizbullah. The movement's ideas about peaceful co-existence conveyed through both human interactions and media have also influenced the public and movement's solid education services have helped rationality override nationalist and ethno-religious sentiments, and create a public opinion against violent means of conduct such as terrorism (Kalyoncu 2007: 602-603). In short, the movement's utilization of social capital in establishing educational, cultural and civic institutions has paved the way for a more cohesive, participative and thus sustainable civil society.

The movement schools have been operating in another multi-ethnic and multi-religious and a very poor region –Kyrgyzstan- for about 20 years. Thousands of students in the country have received a quality and modern education (Keles 2007: 374). In the movement schools, students from different ethnic, religious and socio-economic (the movement schools' 20 percent of student body is composed of poor students who have full scholarships) backgrounds spend most of their time together and in this way, during the school years students learn the norms of tolerance by practice not just mere rhetoric (Keles 2007: 370). Moreover, the diversity of the teachers in terms of ethnic and religious backgrounds also "enhances the students' ability to take their first steps towards a more global environment. Further, they meet with people from other parts of the world who have different histories, habits, languages and behaviours" (Keles 2007: 370).

The movement does not only give priority to poorer countries such as Kyrgyzstan but also to areas where ethnic and religious conflicts are escalating, such as Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, the Philippines, Banda Aceh, Northern Iraq and these schools are believed to "have played remarkable roles in decreasing levels of conflict in these areas" (Saritoprak 2005: 423). In Skopje, Macedonia when civil war was going on in the region, members of different ethnicities were sending their children to the movement's school in the region and while their parents were fighting, the children were being educated peacefully under the roof of the same school (Saritoprak 2007: 637). There are movement schools in Bosnia where the community is "composed of Muslim Bosnians, Christian Serbs and again Christian Croats. Despite their common ethnic identity, and more or less, similar political cultures due to their common Yugoslavian background, these three different communities had as recently as a decade ago engaged in the bloodiest conflict due to nationalistic aspirations. Their religious differences had exacerbated, if not caused, their nationalism-driven conflict" (Kalyoncu 2007: 604). Afghanistan is another example of community which is highly diversified with various ethnic groups such as Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimak, Baluchi, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Nuristani and Pamiri among other small ethnic groups and in this country there are several movement schools including the ones solely for girls (Kalyoncu 603-604). Another country where the movement schools operate is Philippines which is an example of a community stigmatized with an enduring Muslim-Christian fighting (See in detail Michel 2003). Minority Moro Muslims in Philippines are populated in the autonomous region of Mindanao in Southern Philippines. After the end of the colonialism, the conflict in Philippines has transformed into an enduring one between the Muslim minority and the Christian majority. The schools bring together both Christian and Muslim students together under the same roof. The movement schools do not take part in "the conflict. Instead, they prefer to identify common grounds where they get together and cooperate to tackle their common problems" (Kalyoncu 2007: 605). In the African context, field research about Kenya's Turkish "schools suggests that the schools have been functioning not only as a secular alternative to religious, Christian missionary schools and Islamic schools, but also as barriers to potential ethno-religious conflict between Kenya's local Christian tribes and its politically empowering Muslim minority" (Kalyoncu 2008:

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350). There are two movement charity organizations operating in Kenya: the Omeriye Foundation and the Respect Foundation. The Omeriye Foundation provides services in the fields of education, relief and healthcare and “the Respect Foundation focuses its efforts on interfaith dialogue aiming to bring together deeply fractured faith communities in Kenya to cooperate in community projects” (Kalyoncu 2008: 359). Similarly, the movement’s “civil society initiatives in Uganda seem to have introduced the local Ugandans with a pragmatist approach to development by seeking to instil in them the notion of relying on their own resources instead of international aid” (Kalyoncu 2008: 350).

Northern Iraq is a unique case with highly fractured community along the ethno-religious differences. The community composed of Kurds, Sunni Arabs, Turcoman, Shiites, and Assyrian Christians experiences conflicts along the line of these ethno-religious differences. The fact that “neither of these ethno-religious groups inherently possesses democratic political culture further minimizes the prospect of easy development of civil society in Northern Iraq” (Kalyoncu 2007: 604). In such a context, “the role of non-governmental organizations in preventing ethnic conflict and supporting the peace building process has been vital” (Akyol 2008: 28). The movement’s “schools in the Kurdistan region of Iraq have played in building trusting cross-ethnic relationships” (Akyol 2008: 28). There are currently 10 Turkish schools -ranging from nursery level to university- in Iraq. Eight of these schools are in the Suleymaniye (3), Arbil (5) and Kirkuk (2). Unlike the standard Kurdish schools in the movement schools “all students have to study four languages, Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish and English, in the first year, thus improving the opportunities for effective dialogue. This policy clearly demonstrates the movement’s inclusiveness and how the movement works within fragmented societies by valuing each group and by constructing a kind of model of desired society in the schools (Akyol 2008: 47). The schools “have prepared and set up the preconditions for understanding each others’ needs and that in so doing they are able to build confidence between antagonistic parties. In that sense they can serve as mediators between the nation-state Turkey and the semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdish federal region. They are well placed to open channels of communication and to specify the needs of the Kurdish community in Iraq” (Akyol 2008: 28). The schools in the region are spreading the concept of tolerance, dialogue, democracy, and pluralism that are essential for a cohesive and sustainable society. They are also “promoting non-violent conflict resolutions by showing how to approach to social problems through collective cooperation” (Akyol 2008: 51). It is plausible that in the long run perceptions and attitudes of people in the region will change in the movement’s line of thought that advocates peace and non-violence as important elements of democratic political order (Kucukcan 2007: 196). Thus, educational activities of the movement in the region will “open up a political and social space for an alternative approach to the prevention of ethnic conflict. More importantly they present an alternative way of thinking about ethnic conflict resolutions based on an increasing level of social, cultural and trade contacts between conflicting parties” (Akyol 2008: 51).



## Conclusion

It is clear that providing good and quality education especially in diverse multi-ethnic and multi-religious mediums is vital in establishing and sustaining an equitable, fairer and cohesive society. The faith-based Turkish schools movement, by focusing on good and quality education in either poor areas or global conflict zones and multi-ethnic, multi-religious environments, is contributing towards establishing and maintaining sustainable communities. As it is a faith-based volunteer movement, it has successfully directed social capital towards its sustainable-development related projects. While the activities of the movement do not cost anything to the receptive states as it utilizes social capital, by offering good quality education they help stability, peace and long-term sustainable development of the countries where they operate.

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