

Susila Dharma Network Meeting, Lewes, UK Jan 2007

Preliminary Summary on Recommendations and Outcomes



Most of the participants in the Susila Dharma Lewes Meeting on the last day – coming from Austria, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Holland, Norway, Spain, and USA.

1. Introduction

The Susila Dharma meeting at Pelham House in Lewes from January 25-28, 2007 was dynamic and positive and attended by 35-40 Subud members from eight countries. We were able to cover many topics by finding out what people wanted, holding some plenary discussions, breaking into smaller groups and reporting back with recommendations to the larger group. Since it was only possible for SD national organizations from Europe and North America to attend, it is important to share the results with the rest of the SD network. Therefore two reports are being prepared – this short summary and a full report which covers our deeper reflection. We plan, financing permitting, to have similar networking meetings in the next two years in other regions where there are many SD Network members.

This was the first opportunity since the European SD Meeting in Hamburg in March 2003 for an in-depth discussion on the practical realities of how to support partner projects. Members were also able to spend some time with new Executive, Virginia Thomas. Latihan, testing, and sharing experiences strengthened our mutual understanding and trust, and enabled us learn from each other.

The meeting was extremely successful, allowing participants to:

- Identify successes and challenges to SD nationals who want to engage their own Subud membership and enhance group life;
- Share our experiences, concerns and lessons learned from supporting Subud and non-Subud social initiatives;
- Share information about developments in specific projects, countries and regions of the world;
- Initiate a discussion on the need for a mission, goals, operating principles and strategies for the Susila Dharma Network over the coming three-year period to World Subud Congress in January 2010.

2. Strengthening Project Support

A key strength of our approach is that we work on a smaller, more intimate scale than large development institutions. Giving money is only one expression of the support that we can provide to each other. Communication, feedback and mutual understanding and struggle are equally important forms of support. SD Germany, for example, will not allocate funds to a project if they cannot dedicate the time and resources to get to know the people involved very well. A condition of project support is that one member of their team takes responsibility for liaising with the project.

Establishing effective partnership with projects often requires an investment by the SD national in regular communications, including travel, telephone and e-mail. Some SD nationals have difficulty justifying these costs to their donors, given the small scale of their project support. To build these long-term relationships, SD nationals feel a need to educate donors about the value of the human relationships in our work.

3. Lessons Learned About Building Good Partnerships

- Investigate the needs and priorities of the community and understand how the project is proposing to meet these;
- Choose an aspect of the proposal you can fund, given the priorities and capacity of your national SD organisation;
- Encourage sustainability – help partners plan for your funding to end, perhaps by tapering grants over several years.
- Communicate to the project your needs for reporting, monitoring, evaluation, training needs and programmes implementation;
- Set aside resources to make sure that evaluations actually take place and use relevant evaluation tools and approaches;
- Be flexible – appreciate the different cultural norms, technological means and economic situation of your partners;
- Make personal connections – look at backgrounds of the people involved, make field visits to better understand the country and context.
- Since travel can be expensive, take advantage of travel by others, SD national representatives, International Helpers and travellers, who can bring back valuable information. Orient travellers to your needs by inviting them to SD meetings and briefing on the questions you need answered.

4. Project Selection Processes and Criteria

SD nationals need principles and selection criteria to guide project selection, but we also need to remain flexible and consider each project on a case-by-case basis.

- The initiative for carrying out projects has to come from local project leaders – it cannot be imposed or conducted by outsiders;
- For some SDs, Subud involvement is essential and for others it is not. Each SD is free to decide whether to support only initiatives run by Subud members or also to support quality projects that interest their members;
- The goal is to build the capacity of the project to manage itself well; and to obtain recognition and support to ensure its longer term security and sustainability;
- Put in place participatory processes to create a sense of ownership and to ensure the benefits to the community from international support remains even after the initial project has ended;
- Look for ways to lessen dependency and broaden the impact and sustainability of projects, for example, encourage projects that involve local community ‘cadres’ in taking over and encourage the staff to pass on their knowledge to others;
- Duration of support differs from project to project and there is no clear rule. By building long-term partnerships, we get to know the projects well enough to know when and how to withdraw support;
- Hold realistic expectation about the importance and value of project growth.

Too many projects? Concerns were expressed about the types, scale and number of projects we attempt to support as a Network. Do we need to and are we able to support them all? What about those that we cannot support? How can we appropriately support the broad range of needs within our SD Network? Despite the difficulties, participants felt it is important for our network to support social initiatives at each stage – from the smallest and most fragile, to the well-established projects.

Communications. Communicating, sometimes in other languages, with the large number of projects we are trying to support is challenging. In addition to doing their daily work under difficult circumstances, project leaders sometimes try to communicate with many SD nationals. SDIA can facilitate the flow of information, make it available to all SD nationals, and relieve the projects of this additional work.

Capacity Development. The SD nationals would like to support Subud members, no matter what the size or strength of their projects. The network needs to develop its knowledge, skills, networking ability and resources base to provide the right amount and type of support to projects and initiatives at each stage. Capacity Development, or the ability to carry out our responsibilities, needs to be enhanced at all levels of the network – local (projects), national (SD nationals) and international (SDIA) – both organizationally and individually.

Role of Testing. We can use testing as an additional tool for building our capacity to carry out our responsibilities. This is true for all members of the network – projects, SD nationals and international Board and staff. Some SD nationals and Trusts use testing to decide who to support. While having a strong feeling to support a project is important, it is also vital to balance the promptings of the heart with inner and outer understanding of circumstances and practical realities. Testing can specially help us to build bridges with each other, across personalities and cultures, so we can work better together. In increasing awareness about Susila Dharma for Subud members, testing is invaluable.

5. External Fundraising

SD nationals remain quite reliant on direct contributions from Subud members. However seeking outside support for bigger projects is becoming essential. SD Britain and SD Germany have succeeded in securing government counterpart funding, and in Norway and Canada there are also possibilities when the SD nationals become stronger. Outside funding does not solve all problems. SD Germany has established long-term relationship with BMZ, which sets a limit on counter-part funding of 4 years. Thereafter running costs have to be covered by the recipient.

Visits by SD representatives to projects increases mutual understanding of partnership needs. It may also give project managers an opportunity to take a strategic view of their own project, and how to position themselves for funding from other sources. Funding from national SDs is a limited resource so it is important to consider local sources and understand their funding criteria. Fundraising is an important opportunity to build local awareness and ownership of the project.

SDIA and SD nationals who are interested in doing outside fundraising should ask themselves Are we ready for fundraising? Do you know the mission statement of the organisation? Do you have a designated fundraiser or team? Do they have 3 hours a day to spend on fundraising? Often, in SDs our members and Boards are inexperienced as fundraisers and need to learn to articulate why SD work and projects are important in order to convince others.

Strategies to increase our ability raise external funds, especially for larger projects:

- Ensure that everything is in place on both the project and the SD national side to deal with the often stringent reporting requirements of funding agencies.
- Help projects express what they do in a way that is 'fundable.' Proposal writing is an art. Projects may need training to understand how giving basic education or healthcare, which are normally the responsibilities of the state, may be harder to find funding for. It helps if they express what makes their services different and necessary, in relation to other similar undertakings (refugees, or poverty reduction for example).
- Help projects focus on local sources of support and use a participatory approach. It is important to work WITH not only FOR the communities we are trying to help.
- Involve local businesses, institutions, government, other NGOs and project beneficiaries in building long-term local ownership and commitment to maintaining services on behalf of the community. There are few really poor countries, but rather a lot of concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few.
- Use our influence as 'outsiders' to facilitate access to local funding sources. Sometimes we can open doors for our projects: make appointments to visit local government, big NGOs, chambers of commerce, large enterprises, etc. with our project leaders that would sometimes be difficult for locals to do on their own.
- Learn about fundraising and fundraising opportunities in developed countries. Work through NGO associations and intermediary bodies like BOND (UK) and USAID.

Suggested Actions:

- Identify a handful of strong projects and help build their capacity to access non-Subud funding;
- Promote training activities so that projects strengthen their management and proposal writing skills. Good project proposals with clear analysis of the local context, related objectives and activities, indicators of success and procedures for monitoring and evaluation;

- Run seminars on fundraising for SD nationals in different parts of the world, using people who have successfully obtained grants from specific donors and learn about what they did right;
- Research and make available information about national and international funding sources including each donors' funding criteria, funding scale and proposals formats;
- Build long-term relationships with donors agencies (like SD Germany's 20 year relationship with BMZ);
- Obtain funding to contract with dedicated person(s) with time to spend on fundraising.

6. SDIA Team and SD nationals.

What are the strengths of the relationship between those who work on the SD International team (SDIA) and SD Nationals? What do we want to change? What is or should be the value-added brought by SDIA to the network of SD nationals and projects?

Both through testing and discussions, the need of the SD Network for better communications and information sharing was clear. There exists a great diversity of needs among members, stronger SD national organisations, such SD Germany, Britain and USA may have different needs and expectations from SDIA, than smaller SD nationals. For example, many smaller SD nationals as well as individual donors, look to SDIA to facilitate project monitoring and evaluations on their behalf. SD Germany does not need SDIA to do it for them.

SDIA Team's Role

- Network website
- Training & information bank
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Volunteers program
- Coordination of project funding
- Coordination of information
- Communications
- NGO liaison
- External funding research, contacts

Things to Change

- How SDIA facilitates communications between SD nationals and also with and between Subud committees;
- Create a database of development expertise, a "Resource bank" for members;
- Improve use of website and revise it to be more user-friendly; consider a restricted section again and add a confidential SD nationals chat room;
- Be a central point of grant request clearing;
- Foster development of SD nationals;
- Explore cross-project initiatives/services and seek funding for this;
- Deliver services suitable for other NGOs (training for example) and charge a fee;
- Work with International helpers to strengthen inner understanding and practice.

Hot Topics for SD nationals

Other topics that require more attention within our network include

- facilitating volunteer and employment opportunities within social and educational projects;

- developing a volunteer programme (Volunteers without Tears) – as part of the agreement, specify that volunteers should write reports, give talks and help to fundraise when they come home;
- improving our communications, cross-cultural understanding, and increasing our capacity to carry out translations (in Spanish, French, English, German, etc.).
- ‘sustainability’ as a criteria for project support.

7. Improving Communications with Subud Members

Most SD nationals have the task of communicating with Subud members about their activities. Some suggested approached from one workshop:

- finding and building on the skills and interests of Subud members
- encouraging members to join SD to develop their talents
- using humour and ‘keeping it light’
- present the SD work in an accessible and interesting way
- linking a group or a member with a specific project to develop a deeper understanding
- finding out what small scale projects members are already doing that are not associated with SD
- promote the idea that SD can make Subud life more exciting.

This last idea came from Sebastian Tedrow who has experienced how American group life has been stimulated by SD work in the neighbourhood. This opens up the concept of a group of Subud members working with non-Subud partners on a local project.

8. Sustainability as a Criteria for Project Support

Schools make up a large number of our SD projects and many Subud members are attracted to supporting them. However when schools are not directly financed by the state and are serving poor communities, they can rarely be expected to become fully self-sustaining. For some SDs ‘sustainability’ is an important criterion for project selection because they are reluctant to be drawn into a set of never-ending needs. Also, by taking responsibility for the provision of basic services, like healthcare and education, we are permitting the state to get out of its obligations to its citizens. For others, sustainability is not an important criterion for project selection.

Institutional sustainability is not the same as sustainability of results or impacts. In some cases our projects ‘fail’ but the knowledge we, and they gain from the process is important to future success and is not a loss. Even if projects operate and provide services for a short time, some service is better than no service. Lastly, any child who gets an education is a sustainable investment, in terms of an ability to provide for her/his living and to contribute to the community. We can be broad and flexible in terms of our definition of sustainability.

Should we provide long-term support to projects in health care and education which provide basic services for poor communities that often cannot pay for them? If yes, how? Setting up enterprises to support social/educational projects should be considered, but it is important that these do not detract from the original intent and purpose of the project. Once SD nationals begin to fund a project, we need to be clear on what our responsibility entails, how long it lasts and clearly communicate and negotiate these conditions with our projects.

It is important to learn from and respect the differences between our approaches and experiences within our Network. There are lots of projects to support, and we don’t all have to support the same initiatives in the same way. Instead, we have to make these differences work for our projects, to maximize the impact of the resources we have between us.

Recommendations from sustainability workshop:

- to pull together the wealth of experience we have in supporting school and educational projects, and work together to produce case studies that explore different issues and dimensions of their sustainability;
- to approach the Guerrand-Hermes Foundation For Peace to see if they would be interested to partner with the SD Network on such an initiative.
- to form a Working Group on Sustainability.

9. Goals, Actions, Benchmarks to 2009

At the end of the Networking meeting, a draft of ‘network goals’ was created and a working group formed to develop these for discussion and approval at the Annual General Meeting in August in England) Here is the beginning of our deliberations:

- **Reach out to Subud members of all ages** Help build awareness of the inner and outer significance of Susila Dharma in their daily lives.
- **Improve networking, communications and information sharing** between all members of the Network and the Subud community, and National Committees.
- **Increase our learning and knowledge** about our project support work. Draw out our successes and challenges, and document our lessons learned as a network so that we can continually learn from and improve our practices. Learn from and value the diversity and autonomy of all actors within our network.
- **Increase our capacity to support SD initiatives at ALL STAGES of their development**, from the very smallest start-ups to larger, established projects.
- **Articulate our common vision as a network** through approved Mission Statement, Operating Principles and Strategic Plan by August 2007.
- **Widen our ‘footprint’** – our impact and influence as a network – both within Subud and with non-Subud donors, partners and institutions.
- **Work together towards the sustainability of the network** and its members.

For a full report on the proceedings of this meeting including participants list, summary of the activities of SD nationals present and discussion on regional SD activities, see the “Widening Our Footprint: Susila Dharma Networking Meeting, Lewes 2007” which will be posted on the website as soon as it is ready. You can also read four reports from SD National representatives who participated:
http://www.susiladharm.org/reports_sdtrai ning.html

Prepared by Network Office March 2, 2007



Virginia Thomas, SDIA new Executive Director, recording draft goals.