

BUILDING NARRATIVES TO RISING

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INSPIRING THE CHANGE-MAKING
AGENDA FOR WORLD HAPPINESS FEST 2023.
SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR WORLD HAPPINESS



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L U I S G A L L A R D O

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The world today is a complicated place. Technological advancements have allowed us to be more connected than ever, yet we have never been more disconnected from each other and our environment. We are more aware of global problems than ever, yet the physical distance from them provides a (false) sense of security and an excuse not to deal with them. However, we don't realize that in such an interconnected, globalized world, every problem is a global one. It is 2022, yet the social justice issues we face today are more or less the same as they were a hundred+ years ago. How we deal with them will decide the future of humanity and its ability to flourish and prosper.

The connectivity we have has made our world smaller. We can travel more easily and even rally around global causes from our homes. Our voices have more value than ever before. A simple hashtag can create a global movement. It is time we finally realize the power we hold and trust in our ability to institute social change.

The Biggest Social Justice Issues of Today

To say the past two years were challenging would be an understatement. We've dealt with the global pandemic, natural disasters, war, social justice movements, and more. The ongoing pandemic has caused a historic economic downturn with thousands of shut-down businesses and millions of unemployed people. Because of this, social justice issues such as climate change, poverty, racism, and food insecurity are now more important than ever. Here are some of the most pressing social justice issues we face today:

1. Climate change: The effects of climate change and its threat to humanity are more evident than ever before. Aside from obvious physical threats and challenges, climate change can also bring social challenges. It can put a strain on economic and natural resources and harm the well-being of all humanity. But, despite all the evidence, many still live in denial. Because of this, climate change has also become a political issue and a source of great division.

2. Healthcare: An important part of social justice is the ability to have fair access to healthcare. However, this issue remains a controversial subject worldwide. There are still big problems concerning access, coverage, and stigma, especially mental health issues.

3. Racial injustice: This is a problem as old as the world itself. Its impact can be found in practically all aspects of our daily lives. It has had long-term physical, mental, social, political, and economic consequences for various minorities that have faced (and still face) discrimination.

4. LGBTQ+: The rights of LGBTQ+ people have been a long-standing issue worldwide. The people from these groups have been experiencing harassment, discrimination, and violence for many years, and they still face it today. They are often unable to access the same economic, educational, healthcare, political, and other opportunities.

5. Refugee Crisis and Immigration: The refugee crisis still dominates our headlines, and with a reason. According to the UN, since 2019, nearly 70.8 million people have been forced to flee their homes, out of which almost 30 million have ended up in refugee camps worldwide. Refugees face numerous social challenges such as accessing healthcare, education, and economic opportunities.

Building Narratives to Rising

Politicians have long understood the importance of storytelling for expanding their influence and building power, as well as winning short-term victories and long-term systematic change. They know that the language and stories we use play a significant part in shaping our world views and, ultimately, the policies we create and support. These stories, or narratives, about the world around us, can be the wind in our sails, propelling us forward to new frontiers of liberation and significant victories. This is one of the main goals of the World Happiness Foundation.

Over the years, we have focused the World Happiness Fest on exploring insights and experiences through a healing framework to create a fundamental change and peace. In 2021, our focus was on suffering, understanding it, and trying to develop ways we can diminish it on a global level. Life changed suddenly for the entire world when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, and with it came struggles and suffering. We have all experienced a new reality that had a huge impact on our lives. We still experience many of the same difficulties and sorrows the pandemic left behind two years later. Because of this, in 2022, we have shifted our focus on (re)connecting with ourselves, our communities, and nature. Why?

Because during the lockdown, we could see the rebirth of nature in many places around the world. In some sense, we could say that the lockdown liberated nature. As factories closed and motorways cleared, we could see brown pollution belts shrinking over countries within days of lockdown. For many, this was the first glimpse at what the world could look like without fossil fuels. We could also witness just how much nature and green spaces have been comforting during the lockdown. Numerous surveys showed that people felt time in nature helped support their mental and physical well-being during the lockdown. The importance of going back to nature and preserving it was more evident than ever.

Once the worst was over, we understood that we must finally address things that divide us and find permanent solutions so that humanity can make new, big steps towards prosperity and flourishing. With this in mind, we decided to focus the next World Happiness Fest on building narratives to human rising. A good example of this global way of thinking and addressing social justice issues are books by two very inspiring people - Leah Thomas and Aja Barber.

Leah's [*The Intersectional Environmentalist*](#) acts as the intersection between environmentalism, racism, and privilege and acknowledges the fundamental truth that we cannot save the planet without uplifting the voices of its people, especially those often unheard. It aims to educate the next generation of activists on how to create inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable change. Aja's [*Consumed*](#) addresses the grave problem of over-consumerism, asking us to look at how and what we buy and how we can solve the problems created by a wasteful system.

This proactive and fundamental change is what the World Happiness Foundation wants to support and participate in. We need to appreciate and cherish each other just as much as we need to respect and care for this beautiful planet. We must build new social justice narratives that address the world's major issues and create a new paradigm of living. Such narratives can help us go from indifference to empathy, and empathy leads to action. In my mind, this is the only way to go.

An IDEA For Social Justice

"Social justice is the surest guarantor of peace in the world." - Guy Ryder

An awakening to systemic racism, inequality, stigma, and other harmful behavior in the context of a global pandemic has made these social injustices impossible to ignore anymore and is slowly driving governments, world leaders, and organizations to establish and strengthen approaches to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (I.D.E.A.). Countries and organizations within them are shaping the future of humanity and therefore have a responsibility to make IDEA central to their missions. So far, we have seen many organizations taking firm action critically important to embedding IDEA principles, but permanent change will not be achieved until the IDEA framework becomes a core leadership competency.

What Does IDEA Stand For?

Inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility, or IDEA for short, is an acronym that broadly outlines the efforts institutions and organizations make to create a more welcoming environment for people of less-privileged statuses. As a whole, inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility efforts seek to create meaningful systemic change toward more equitable environments. Part of the problem with building an IDEA strategy is not knowing the difference between these four concepts and how to address each. To help you better understand and properly start, let's break down the individual parts:

1. Inclusion - Everyone feels welcomed and valued: Inclusion is the act of forming environments

in which any group or individual can be and feel welcome, represented, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming environment is one that embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions towards all people. It is important to mention that while an inclusive group is by definition diverse, a diverse group isn't necessarily inclusive. By recognizing unconscious or implicit biases, institutions and organizations can be deliberate in addressing issues of inclusivity.

2. Diversity - All the ways people differ: Diversity includes all of the ways we as humans differ, encompassing various characteristics that make one person or a group different from another. While diversity is often used in relation to race, gender, and ethnicity, it, in fact, embraces a broader spectrum of characteristics such as age, national origin, disability, religion, sexual orientation, education, socioeconomic status, marital status, language, physical appearance, and other identifiers that make one person or group different from another.

3. Equity - Everyone has the opportunity to fully participate: Equity incorporates the policies and practices used to ensure the fair treatment, opportunity, access, and advancement for all people, while it also tries to identify and eliminate the barriers that have historically prevented the complete participation of some people or groups. Improving equity means increasing fairness and justice within the processes and procedures of institutions, systems, and organizations, as well as in their distribution of resources.

4. Access - Of any and all abilities: Access refers to the commitment of institutions and organizations for everyone to be included in all activities and programs. In other words, it is the means of enabling every individual or group to participate in society as independently as possible.

Using an Abundance Mindset to Advance Social Justice

"The illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." - Alvin Toffler.

We've all heard about the terms abundance and scarcity mindsets. These terms are used to explain the mindsets of people who think in scarcity mindsets as opposed to others who think in terms of abundance. Having a scarcity mindset will make you believe there are not enough jobs, not enough resources, not enough innovation, funding, simply - not enough. This way of thinking ultimately limits us and closes us off from the world. Contrary to this, an abundant mindset can help us acknowledge various business opportunities, plenty of resources, funding options, and innovation (just look at what's happening with Web 3.0, blockchain, innovation in utility management that can save us from climate change, etc.).

Within reason, a scarcity mindset can help us keep our focus on important things, plan, budget, and predict, all so that we may safely run our lives, businesses, organizations, and governments. On the other hand, an abundance mindset allows us to focus on the emergence of new opportunities and new options, which in turn leads to larger visions. Once we start to look for

more, we soon see more everywhere around us, and we begin to expect more. Undoubtedly, turning a scarcity mindset into an abundant one leads to positive results, both on an individual and global level. So, how can leaders of organizations, institutions, and even governments make a shift towards an abundance mindset and with it advance social justice?

Well, it's obvious where they need to start - from their own mindsets. Leaders must infuse the social justice narrative with an empowering, abundant perspective to kickstart the change and break free from things that have held us back so far. From there, we must:

1. Acknowledge the gap between the current state of social justice issues and what needs to be changed;
2. Commit to unlearning, no matter how challenging it seems for leaders to stop their scarcity mindset from becoming a barrier to learning and building new ways of functioning that would be based on the IDEA framework, and finally;
3. Practice the new model of functioning continually. Like any bad habit, unlearning requires commitment, practice, and repetition.

The World Happiness Foundation's goal is to help connect organizations and world leaders to each other around the important subjects, initiatives, and programs so that they can explore and create (so much needed) shared roadmaps toward achieving common social justice goals. But, to begin this important work, we must reframe how we think and address the issues that will allow all people to live with dignity, respect, opportunity, and safety. I believe we can do this.

Harnessing Anger to Drive Change

"Anger is not bad. Anger can be a very positive thing, the thing that moves us beyond the acceptance of evil." - Joan Chittister

When Nobel prize winner Kailash Satyarthi was born, he was lucky enough to be born into a high caste in India, meaning he had all the opportunities to develop into an educated, strong-minded, and capable human being. When he was eleven years old, he saw some of his friends leaving school because their parents could not afford textbooks, and he got angry at this injustice. This would be the start of his long-lasting relationship with motivational anger.

When he was fifteen, he decided to celebrate Gandhi's birth centenary in a different way - by inviting the elders of his hometown to dine with the lowest of the castes, the untouchables. He was impressed by the leaders of his town, seeing them speaking highly against the caste system and untouchability, praising Gandhian ideals. So he sat on his bike and invited them one by one to come and dine with the people they wouldn't otherwise let into their shops or homes. They all agreed to come, but when the time came for them to gather at the table, none showed up. Instead of leading by example and in accordance with Gandhi's ideals, they all hid inside their homes and behind their empty words.

When Kailash returned home, he saw several high-caste people sitting in his courtyard, waiting to punish him and even outcast his entire family. They gave him an ultimatum to repent, take a pilgrimage to the River Ganges, and organize a feast for 101 priests when he came back. Only then could he continue living as he did so far. But Kailash refused and once again turned to anger. This fundamental emotion gave wind to his sails, resulting in him becoming a world-renowned social reformer and child rights activist. With his colleagues, Satyarthi has freed 83 000 children from slavery and led a global march against child labor that helped spur the UN's International Labour Organisation to adopt a convention protecting children against exploitation and hazardous work.

Using Anger for a Good Cause

Our emotions can be forceful motivators, in particular anger. Although this emotion has a bad rep since it can lead to violence and other bad behavior, there is still another side to anger, which a growing cadre of scientists is trying to uncover. Instead of being a destructive state, anger can be a potent force of nature that can move us forward and fuel optimism, problem-solving, and creative brainstorming. In other words, if we want to make a change, we need the powerful motivational push that anger can provide.

The idea that anger can be beneficial for us isn't new, in fact, Aristotle wrote in 350 BC that 'the angry man aims at what he can attain, and the belief that he can attain it is pleasant.' This is also supported by our biology because when we get angry and properly channel this energy build-up, our levels of the stress hormone drop, helping us calm down and get ready to face problems, not run from them.

The feelings of righteousness and control that come from anger can motivate us to challenge and change problematic interpersonal and social injustices. It can help us push past our fear and vulnerability and, as Brené Brown explains it, take a risk without knowing the outcome. In other words, when you can't take it anymore - show up and let yourself be seen and heard. By acting on our emotions, particularly anger, to make wrong things right, we are opening ourselves to joy and connection, but this can only happen if we also accept that there could be pain. And if there is no pain, then the anger cannot spring out, making this process an important and complete emotional circle.

Anger can allow you to vent out tensions and frustrations, and it can provide the energy and resolve needed to defend yourself or others when they've been wronged. If you are a person who has been dealing with an abusive situation, anger can be a positive force that can motivate you to finally resolve the problem or leave, and if you are a dedicated social justice crusader (like Kailash, Martin Luther King Jr., or Gandhi), the anger can give you the strength to carry on, and the will to persevere despite the difficulties you may face.

Using Anger and Other Emotions to Our Advantage

To properly use the energy that anger releases, or any other emotion for that matter, and not let it waste away, we must learn how to control and utilize them to our advantage. And this learning should start in schools. Social-emotional learning (SEL Core Competencies) has a massive

potential to create conditions for (youth) agency and civic engagement, and lastly, social change. We owe our children this important education that is relevant to their lives and which will help them one day become the leaders and changemakers we need.

Self-awareness can teach them their strengths and weaknesses, help them reflect on their personal and social identities, and examine biases and prejudices. Social awareness and relationship skills can help them develop cultural competency, allowing them to empathize with people from all backgrounds. Learning self-management will allow them to regulate their emotions and behaviors, while responsible decision-making will teach them how to set goals and take action to improve their communities and the world.

With these competencies, people of all ages can learn to build more meaningful relationships that will help them recognize, examine, and interrupt bad policies and practices in their communities and beyond, analyze social problems and work together to create solutions and take action. The results this learning process can bring are worth the effort!

Social Justice and Fundamental Peace

"Peace is not only absence of violence, it is the presence of justice." - Mahatma Gandhi.

Peace is (or it should be) a desirable goal of every person and every country. We simply need it if we want to have economic and social stability. Peace, therefore, should be a primary political objective that responsible leaders and governments should not ignore. No matter where you go, in every corner of this beautiful planet, there are people who will tell you that they want to live in peace and prosperity, and you should believe they aren't just saying it.

Despite all our flaws and combativeness, peace lies in the heart of humanity. However, peace has its conditions. Unless it doesn't include social justice, fundamental peace is nothing more than wishful thinking. An equitable (international) order is unattainable without human dignity, non-discrimination, and social justice as prerequisites for sustainable economic and social development.

Where There is No Justice, There Can Be No Peace

"True peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice." - Martin Luther King

The law of nature teaches us that everyone should do to others what they wish for themselves, and everyone is also required not to do to others what they do not want to be done to them. So, we can conclude that the natural law is the law of humanity and, as such, the basic order of peace between humans. Tomas Aquinas once wrote that justice originates from what applies to everyone, therefore, from nature's law and our desire to live in peace.

Hence, we can define justice as recognizing the other person's life and freedom and their right to be treated with humanity and respect. Because each and every one of us possesses dignity, people must never be objectified, enslaved, hurt, discriminated against, or marginalized in words or deeds. Human rights stem from these points of view. In fact, human rights, access, participation, and equity are four essential pillars on which social justice stands. Without them, peace and justice cannot be achieved.

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However, justice cannot be obtained by one or few, it requires active participation from us all. We must become a part of social justice movements that aim for fundamental change and give voice to voiceless, oppressed, and marginalized economically, politically, ecologically, and socially. If we truly want peace, then we have to challenge the injustices that rob so many people of the peace they deserve.

Peace is not just the mere absence of conflict, violence, or war, it is an active and collaborative process. It starts and applies to our homes and communities, not just politics. Peace is never automatic, nor is it permanent or self-maintaining, but a long-lasting process of change for the better.

Social Justice and Happiness

"The cause of justice is the cause of humanity. Its advocates should overflow with universal goodwill. We should love this cause, for it conduces to the general happiness of mankind." - William Godwin

While we can do a lot to ensure our own happiness and well-being, our social and political environment plays a vital role in our happiness, as well. Precisely, recent research proposes that supportive government policies like affordable childcare, health care coverage, environmental protection, or parental leave make a big difference in how we feel in our daily lives.

According to a 2020 'Happiness as fairness' study, people who live in countries that promote and support greater social justice tend to be happier. In the study, researchers Isaac Prilleltensky and Salvatore Di Martino used data from the EU Social Justice Index, which scores European countries on such indicators as educational and health care equity for poor and ethnic minorities, non-discrimination policies, gender representation in government, unemployment levels of native and non-native people, and intergenerational justice (low public debt, low greenhouse gas emissions per capita, good pension policies, etc.).

According to this research, not only does a country's social justice contribute to people's happiness, but it is, in fact, the second strongest predictor of people's satisfaction. Only a country's social capital matters more to people's happiness and well-being (which is the level of trust in institutions, the strength of family and friend relationships, and the degree of civic participation).

However, we really don't need official research to conclude that a well-ordered society that respects and supports freedom, justice, and peace for all directly correlates to people's happiness. As Prilleltensky explains, when we have fairer welfare policies, we can spend less time worrying about meeting our basic needs like health care or education and have more time to pursue our goals and be more productive. When countries have greater social justice, they send a message to their citizens that they are valued and that they matter to their communities and their country, which is vital to our well-being.

Greater social justice also builds trust in communities and institutions, reduces prejudices, and

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improves relationships. On the other hand, when people live in countries with more inequality, they tend to take more risks to achieve the required level of satisfaction. For example, in one report, the USA has ranked at the bottom in social justice, which may explain why their happiness levels are dropping. Contrary to this, New Zealand, a country that moves towards greater social equity, is seeing increases in happiness. We can safely say that living in a country where the government prioritizes measures that support well-being affects the happiness of its citizens.

The purpose of the World Happiness Foundation and its World Happiness Fest is to provide a forum for dialogue, advocacy, strategic initiatives, and networking among thought leaders to give voice and address injustice and inequity and to advance the freedom, happiness, and empowerment of those who are oppressed and marginalized by society. If you are one of those thought provokers, change-makers, shapers, researchers, and practitioners, we invite you to join us and help us make the world the best it can be - together.