



The Role of Relationships and Trust-building in Environmental Justice and Protection

COHOSTED BY THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
MIDDLE EAST STUDIES CENTER & GLOBAL WATER INSTITUTE



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY



MARMARA
MUNICIPALITIES
UNION

Event Description

The Role of Relationships and Trust-building in Environmental Justice and Protection was a Marmara Urban Forum Event, in partnership with The Ohio State University, to connect people and deepen their understanding of the need for trust-building for water access and agriculture projects. The event discussed multiple ways in which strong relationships can be transformative with regard to water access and food security in a diverse array of communities around the world. Participants included environmental scientists, practitioners working in the field, and local on multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural team-building.

The session addressed key questions:

- What does it take to develop strong partnerships with local communities?
- What are the keys to engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including local and national governments, NGOs, donors, private sector actors, and universities?
- How strong relationships can be transformative with regard to water access and food security in a diverse array of communities around the world.



20

**People participated in the
intimate conversation
about trust-building.**

7000

**People attended the
Marmara Urban Forum
Networking Event.**

Report Overview

The intended use of this report is to provide key tools for individuals and organizations doing justice and equity work across geographies. It can especially serve as an introduction to the mindset necessary for white people involved in this work. Included is a knowledge bank.

This report is broken down into the two themes that our team of experts identified through each speaker's presentation in this event:

1. **Power & Dialogue** Dr. Rebecca Gianotti's reflects on how unaddressed power dynamics and cultural gaps can slow down the necessary outcomes for the work to be done. Through humility and active listening, context gaps can be bridged for an equitable exchange to be cultivated between diverse teams.
2. **Team Building & Innovation** Prof. Dr. Charles Vörösmarty's work over the past decades has centered around building teams to solve complex problems and produce innovations. He highlights how interdisciplinary teams are able to more sustainably and comprehensively tackle issues of inequity in access.

"OUR TEAM PRODUCED THIS AS A COMPREHENSIVE COMPILATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE SPEAKER PRESENTATIONS, NOTES AND THE SPECTRUM OF LIFE EXPERIENCES EMBEDDED IN THE CONVERSATION."

MALINI SRIKRISHNA, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER OF MILAN GLOBAL



Dr. Rebecca Gianotti, Global Water Institute, The Ohio State University, shared her experiences from her work focused on water access and water security in rural communities, particularly in East Africa. This work involves developing strong partnerships with communities and a broad range of stakeholders, including local and national governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donors, private sector actors, and other universities.

“Be prepared to not be the most important person at the table.”

Dr. Gianotti spoke about the lessons she’s learned about differential power dynamics when working with communities to support their goals. She described some strategies she uses to build more meaningful and equitable relationships.



On Power & Dialogue

- **Start and stay humble**, particularly when you lead dialogues. You may have the least contextual understanding of a situation. It's important to be guided by local knowledge. Lack of understanding is detrimental to relationships and project success.
- **Be mindful** of each partner's capacity when setting goals. Communities that have experienced severe injustice deserve trustworthy partners, not broken promises. Stay open to the need to change project scope and be willing to compromise if needed.
- **Be clear about your values** while going into this work. Make sure you are working for a vision and people, not systems and donors.
- **Respect looks different** in different contexts. Actively listen, observe, and when necessary, be open and ask.

"It is worth it to invest the time to have dialogues over and over."



Prof. Dr. Charles Vörösmarty is the Director of the Environmental Sciences Initiative at the City College New York University (CUNY) Advanced Science Research Center. He is an engineer, most known for his work in large-scale earth system science in the domain of water. He has led numerous interdisciplinary study teams carrying out research on hydrology and water resource systems worldwide; strategic regional water-environment-food-energy risks; and, global threats to human water security and aquatic biodiversity. In his talk, shared his vast experience with formulating collaborative and coherent research questions. His talk showed that communities need to work together to come up with innovative and effective solutions.

"Centering systems and effective interdisciplinary teamwork reconceptualizes how we do research "



On Team Building & Innovation

- **Shift conversations to be more inclusive.** For example, the approach to water security the team Dr. Prof. Vörösmarty worked with was different. It went beyond human security, to include the security of all aquatic life.
- **Context is key** for applying knowledge effectively. Ensure you are approaching issues from a variety of disciplines.
- **Diverse skillsets and thinking open up more possibilities** for innovation and outputs.

"Let your team address the issues from every side."

- **Build teams around visions and goals to achieve them.** If everyone is clear on the destination, the input is very intentional.
- **Be open and respectful,** especially learning from people whose life experience differ from yours.

Knowledge Bank

On Power & Dialogue

- *To Hell With Good Intentions* by Ivan Illich
- *The White Savior Industrial Complex: A Cultural Studies Analysis* by Brittany A. Aronson
- *Volunteer tourism and “The White Man’s Burden”*: globalization of suffering, white savior complex, religion and modernity by Ranjan Bandyopadhyay
- *A Dialogue: Culture, Language, and Race* by P. Freire & Donaldo P. Macedo
- *Aid to Africa: Redeemer Or Coloniser* by Hakima Abbas and Yves Niyiragira

On Team Building & Innovation

- *Beyond Individual Creativity: The Superadditive Benefits of Multicultural Experience for Collective Creativity in Culturally Diverse Teams* by Carmit T. Tadmor, Sujin Jang, et. al
 - *From Conflict to Cooperation: Building Stronger Cross Cultural Teams* by Michael Henman
 - *How to Build Trust on Your Cross-Cultural Team* by Andy Molinsky and Ernest Gundling
 - *Why Diverse Teams Are Smarter* by David Rock and Heidi Grant
 - *How Diversity Can Drive Innovation* by Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Melinda Marshall and Laura Sherbin
 - *Radical innovation: crossing knowledge boundaries with interdisciplinary teams* by Alan F. Blackwell, Lee Wilson, et. al
-

PRODUCED BY MILAN GLOBAL

MILANGLOBAL.IN

TEAM@MILANGLOBAL.IN

