DIGNITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Paper 1 in PSJP's Defining Key Concepts series

Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace

About Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace (PSJP)

Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace (PSJP) is a network for social change. Its purpose is to support the development and adoption of ideas about what makes a good society, to connect and strengthen the agents of this work and contribute to the infrastructure that supports progressive social change.

About PSJP's Defining Key Concepts series

For philanthropy and development practices to have a significant impact on root causes of poverty, marginalization and violence, they need to be better aligned with social change agendas that are people led. This involves 'defining key concepts' that are commonly used in development and elucidating their meaning and implications in practice. PSJP is facilitating a peer-learning environment in order to do this and is exploring the following six themes:

1. Dignity and development
2. Building community resilience
3. Measuring change
4. Sustainability
5. Community philanthropy
6. Leadership

These terms are frequently used in development and philanthropy, and they are included in many organizations' mission statements and performance indicators, but often there is no clear understanding of what they mean in practice or how they can be measured. As a first step to develop this understanding we are facilitating discussions among a diverse set of practitioners in the field on these topics and producing papers which will be shared on http://www.psjp.org. We hope to engage in wider ranging discussion in response to the papers and invite you to share your perspectives, experience and research on these themes. To contribute a blog write to us at chandrika@psjp.org

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INTRODUCTION

The current paper focuses on 'dignity' and forms part of the PSJP series on 'defining key concepts' in development and philanthropy. The 1948 Declaration of Human Rights enshrined dignity as the central goal of development, yet the term is not clearly defined, which makes it difficult to pursue and impossible to measure. Different people and organizations committed to the pursuit of dignity are likely to have different understandings of the term. The aim of this paper is to come up with a clearer definition of dignity and to begin to explore approaches to measuring it. We hope this will help people working in the field to improve their practice and increase the impact of what they do.

The data for this article is drawn from three webinars, which enabled in-depth discussions among a total of 14 people from different kind of organizations, including social services, human rights and community philanthropy. All the discussants were part of a grants programme designed to increase human dignity, and data from the programme is used to supplement the discussions.

Although our aim in this paper is to define the idea of dignity, we are trying to stimulate a conversation about this rather than to be definitive. Our hope is that practitioners will share with us their understandings of the term dignity; any tips or tools they have encountered or developed for addressing their work through a dignity lens; the challenges they experience in this work; and the ways they are trying to assess how well they are doing. We would very much welcome your thoughts, which could be published as blogs or comments on the PSJP website. For those who wish to take part in discussion, contact details are given at the beginning of this document.

Origins of dignity and development

The relationship between dignity and development began shortly after the Second World War. The old idea of dignity, which emerged out of the Renaissance and was developed by Immanuel Kant, was fused with the new idea of development, a term which was coined by President Truman in his [Inaugural Address] in January 1949. The newly formed United Nations was designed to bring these two ideas together. The 1948 Declaration of Human Rights was based on 'the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family'. Truman said that this was the goal of development, which should be '… a cooperative enterprise in which all nations work together through the United Nations'.

Dignity has formed the leitmotif for countless UN Development Reports ever since. For example, Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize,

made a special contribution to the 2002 Human Development Report Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World[1]. She writes:

> 'Respect for human dignity implies commitment to creating conditions under which individuals can develop a sense of self-worth and security. True dignity comes with an assurance of one's ability to rise to the challenges of the human situation. Such assurance is unlikely to be fostered in people who have to live with the threat of violence and injustice, with bad governance and instability or with poverty and disease. Eradicating these threats must be the aim of those who recognize the sanctity of human dignity and of those who strive to promote human development. Development as growth, advancement and the realization of potential depends on available resources—and no resource is more potent than people empowered by confidence in their value as human beings.'

This passage has been quoted in full because it is typical of the kinds of speeches made by senior people in the development industry. The late Kofi Annan made many speeches about dignity, as did his successor Ban Ki-moon. As he took office on 1 January 2017, the new Secretary-General of the UN, António Guterres[2], said 'Human dignity will be the core of my work.'

Noble aims; disreputable practices

From this, we can conclude that development has a noble aim. The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that dignity is an inalienable right, because 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights', and it cannot, therefore, be taken away from people.

However, dignity can be violated in many ways and recent evidence suggests that development practices have not lived up to expectations, shown not least by the recent sexual misconduct issues that have surfaced in the sector. In the words of the British International Development Committee of MPs, there has been an 'abject failure'[3] to deal with longstanding concerns about sexual exploitation.

Philanthropy and aid practices are no stranger to undignified practices either. To share just one example, speaking at the 10th anniversary conference of the Foundations for Peace Network in 2016, Ambika Satkunanthan talked about how, in conflict-torn Sri Lanka, 'the influx of external aid in 2002 and

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[1] http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/263/hdr_2002_en_complete.pdf

[2] https://www.un.org/sg/en

[3] https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jul/31/mps-accuse-aid-groups-of-abject-failure-in-tackling-sexual-abuse?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Tweet

then to some extent post-2009 after the end of the armed conflict' undermined local agency and trust in communities. 'For instance, there was conflict within a network of 2000 women due to the creation of 2 paid positions by a donor to manage the affairs of the network, whereas previously it was done on a volunteer basis. This not surprisingly led to conflict about who should be hired for those positions because most of the members were economically disadvantaged and as this was seen to benefit only 2 of 2000 women.'[4]

A growing conversation

The combination of noble aims and inadequate methods raises questions that the development industry needs to answer. In a guest post for Oxfam, called What does 'Dignity' add to our understanding of development?[5], Tom Wein of the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics requests a conversation about the meaning of dignity in development. He asks questions such as: 'Is your program respectful? How, exactly, do you know that? Did you ask people?'

One of the problems with the term 'dignity' is that it tends to be used by people with high status as a placeholder for the highest good without specifying the content of what it means in practical terms. In part, this is because dignity – like love, friendship, hope and faith – is a 'cluster concept'[6] philosophically and a 'thick concept'[7] anthropologically, which means that it is ubiquitous in every culture but open to a variety of interpretations.[8] This means that dignity is a difficult concept to pin down, let alone implement as a strategy or envision as a goal.

For these reasons, dignity is seldom talked about in philanthropy and development; it is not defined and it inevitably follows that there are problems with its measurement. This is the question that PSJP wanted to address. The topic emerged from a preliminary set of conversations with development

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[4] 10 Years of Foundations for Peace Anniversary Conference Report, 4th November 2016, Foundations for Peace Network http://foundationsforpeace.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/FFP-Anniversary-Conference-report.pdf

[5] https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/what-does-dignity-add-to-our-understanding-of-development/

[6] A cluster concept is one that is defined by a weighted list of criteria, such that no one of these criteria is either necessary or sufficient for membership. Wittgenstein alleged that game was such a concept.

[7] In philosophy, a thick concept (sometimes: thick normative concept, or thick evaluative concept) is a kind of concept that has a significant degree of descriptive content as well as being evaluatively loaded. Paradigmatic examples are various virtues and vices such as courage, cruelty, truthfulness and kindness.

[8] See: Y M Barilan (2018) Review of Remy Debes (ed), *Dignity: A History*, Oxford University Press, 2017, available from: https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/dignity-a-history/

actors who said that they would like to examine their work through a 'dignity lens' as a learning theme for improving practice and increasing impact.

This report is based on three webinar discussions on 'dignity and development' held by PSJP on 11 July 2018 among 14 participants. It is worth noting that participants come from all over the world, from Australia across the continents to the USA. They vary in size from small community-based organizations to international NGOs and international foundations; and in their approach from those that provide direct services such as palliative care to those that make grants and support community development, with social change at a structural level as their long-term goal. What they have in common, however, is their insistence on the importance of human dignity in their work and their discussions are an attempt to define what dignity means and explore ways to measure it.

'DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT DIGNITY IS NOT WORTH HAVING'

The conversations were provoked by a 2015 statement by Jonathan Glennie (a writer and researcher on international development) that 'development without dignity is not worth having'. He wrote this in light of a report released at the end of 2014 in which then UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon set out his vision for the sustainable development goals. In his article in the *Guardian* titled 'The saddest thing in the world is not poverty; it's loss of dignity'[9] Glennie argues that 'development is more than just achieving outcomes – it implies a different way of seeing the world and fellow human beings' and puts 'dignity' at the core of the work.

The webinars revisited this statement in light of the sexual misconduct issues in the sector. All discussants agree with it. Each participant affirms his or her belief that indeed dignity is central to development work: 'it is at the core of development and what we are in this business for.' 'It's interwoven in everything we do.' 'Our mandate is to improve the quality of life of people with dementia, which is mostly related to the elderly, and dignity is the key word here, a crucial component to be included in development.' They also acknowledge that dignity is a complex phenomenon, universally recognized by human beings but intangible: 'you cannot point to it in the world.' 'You know it when you see it or recognize it in its absence.'

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[9] https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/28/dignity-sustainable-development-goals

Invisible but knowable, it emerges that dignity cuts across all we do, in the methods we use and in the outcomes we aim for. The discussions point to two key frames through which dignity can be built, sustained or undermined in development work: 1) In our methods of work. How do we treat people? 2) In our goals and outcomes. Does our work shift power to people and communities or does it take power and agency away from them?

Dignity and relationships

Webinar participants see dignity in the complexity of relationships, in 'how we relate to people'. Development they insist must be built on 'mutual respect' and 'compassion'. Dignity is about 'the right of a person to be valued and respected and to be treated ethically'. Participants who provide direct services to the elderly in particular are emphatic about the importance of relationships between individuals. One participant notes: 'the heart of palliative care is that it supports individuals and their families in all areas of pain and the ethos of that is dignity.'

Dignity and agency

The issues of power, voice, control and choice as central to dignity are expressed in various ways in the webinars.

Some participants stress power and voice:

> 'When we are talking about dignity what we are really talking about is power and power dynamics in relationships. And it is not for people with power to decide what people with no power need. We have to listen to voices on the receiving end of development and how the development process leaves them feeling.'

> 'People need to have a voice about change that will happen in their community.'

Others stress participation and control:

> 'In our work one of the main expressions of dignity is the degree of agency and participation that participants actually have over their own development … how involved they are in developing their schools and hospitals.'

> 'As people are facing the end of their lives, dignity becomes a critical factor because they are not in control.'

PRACTICES AND BEHAVIOURS THAT REDUCE DIGNITY

Participants examine how behaviours and practices in development and philanthropy can do more harm than good, causing loss of respect in relationships or a loss of agency and control over their decisions and life:

> 'It forces us to reflect on ourselves and on this traditional divide between donor and recipient and us and them and to think about whether what we are doing is dignified. It forces us to reflect on how development is conducted in light of the recent sexual misconduct issue. It's a key thing to ask ourselves, are we going about foreign development in an undignified manner? A lot of government and foreign aid may not be considered dignified as it is used to advance its own economic and policy agendas and conducted in a reprehensible manner. It's not just about the lack of dignity in the work but about ourselves as well.'

This overturns the assumption that it is only the recipients who lose dignity when development and philanthropy treat people with disrespect or without compassion. It is the donor and their practices that are undignified. In the main, two failures in development and philanthropy emerge that reduce dignity.

Lack of a sound analysis of the effects of membership in oppressed classes and of power structures in communities

When development actors and donors implement strategies without understanding the context and the power structures in communities, they can cause more harm than good and land up undermining dignity. An example is shared by a community development organization working in Myanmar:

> 'we wanted to help physically and mentally disabled people by setting up groups to help them in their everyday life but there was a barrier. They didn't want to be in the spotlight because it would take away their dignity in this particular culture.'

Another time that they 'got it wrong' and landed up undermining the dignity of the women they wanted to help was when they implemented a microfinance project:

> 'They [the women] took the money home and their husbands took it away… because of the hierarchical culture the women were crushed. From that point on we were not doing any microfinance without the men and talked about dignity and what it is to respect women. In this

case the women lost their dignity and were rendered worse than they started. We got it wrong.'

Replicating colonial power structures

In addition, development and philanthropy practices and the political framing of the work can be disempowering and replicate colonial power structures, reducing the dignity of people in myriad ways. The 'civilizing mission' is one such practice that undermines the agency of people. A participant notes: 'we come in as rich outsiders and tell them how underdeveloped they are.' In similar vein a participant who worked with CBOs in Vietnam for 16 years laments how the aid architecture takes away power and control from local people by encouraging competition for funds:

> 'The international organizations get the funds and then micromanage the local organizations. They [local organizations] lose their confidence, their willingness to speak up, and all the things along those lines. Little aspects contribute to this loss of power like conducting meetings of local and international NGOs only in English.'

She further remarks on the failure of international aid to learn from its mistakes: 'after an evaluation they recognized some of the problems, ie that they were taking away control from local people, but they seem to repeat their errors and that causes a lot of damage.'

HOW DO WE ENSURE DIGNITY IN DEVELOPMENT?

Dignity is a complex and intangible subject yet the discussions shed light on often interrelated principles and practices in philanthropy and development that build dignity or at least do not reduce dignity.

The do no harm principle

It is noted above how even well-meaning assistance can do more harm than good. The principle of 'do no harm' is therefore insisted upon in the discussions as the first stepping-stone to upholding the dignity of those they seek to serve. 'In our actions in meaning to do good things we inadvertently do things that reduce people's dignity.' It follows: 'it's not about what we do but how we do it. How people feel is very important.'

Inclusive framing and strategy development

Two approaches are noted that help to counter colonial behaviours and practices that undermine the local agency of people such as telling them what they need, implementing strategies that create dependence and disregarding the cultural contexts of communities. These are:

- Ensuring a political framing that is respectful and empowering: an organization working to improve the quality of life of people with dementia and their care givers based in Indonesia uses 'inclusivity' as their framing. 'We like to empower people and encourage people to build an inclusive society.' This ensures that we are building a society that works for everyone where people with dementia can live with dignity rather than creating a world where they are excluded and their dignity violated.

- Enabling the agency of the people you seek to serve, doing things with them rather than to them: some organizations like the one in Myanmar like to ensure that the voices of all stakeholders of a development project are included from the start:

> 'We have policies in place to involve stakeholders and beneficiaries from the first place. This is one way of ensuring dignity. It's part of everything we do and part of our policies.'

Another organization that delivers sustainable projects in predominantly remote communities in northern India, Nepal and Kenya also stresses the importance of community engagement at strategy level:

> 'In our work we do consultations with communities about the changes they want to see rather than making decisions about that so all our programmes are to help people achieve these changes. It is related to agency and sense of control. All our projects have community-led activities and develop change makers with the community such as developing leadership and education skill building etc. It's about enabling choices.'

Human rights framework

Some participants, particularly those working with marginalized groups that have been historically discriminated against and are denied their rights and freedoms, use the human rights framework to ensure that their work upholds the individual rights and dignity of the communities they serve. The organization working for people with dementia and their care givers in particular finds the human rights framework helpful because 'often people with dementia receive treatment (such as being physically and chemically restrained) that contravenes their human rights'. They use a human rights-based approach published by WHO[10] that stresses rights that are inherent to

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[10] Ensuring a human rights-based approach for people living with dementia, WHO: http://www.who.int/mental_health/neurology/dementia/dementia_thematicbrief_human_rights.pdf

the dignity of every human but often overlooked in people with dementia and their care givers. These are:

- the rights of participation of people living with dementia and their caregivers in all decisions which affect their lives and wellbeing;
- accountability of public and private bodies, non-governmental organizations and individuals who are responsible for the care of people living with dementia for the respect and protection of their care recipients;
- the right to be free from discrimination based on any grounds such as age, disability, gender, race, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, health status and also directly because of their dementia;
- to be empowered to claim their rights rather than simply wait for policies, legislation or the provision of services;
- and all measures related to dementia adopted by States and other stakeholders to be linked to human rights standards contained in, and principles derived from, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.

Other helpful tools used by them include the 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' and their approach is also in accord with WHO's age-friendly pillars.[11]

Staff selection and training

A critical aspect of dignity noted above is dignity in relationships and participants acknowledge that development workers can cause harm in how they treat people. This comes to the fore for an organization that provides palliative care because they 'deal with people at the most vulnerable times of their life'. 'We think that development workers have been causing a lot of harm in ill-treating the recipients/beneficiaries.' They have therefore revised their approach to community development and now stress values of 'respect' for people who are being assisted, respect for their culture and beliefs and the importance of hearing their voices: 'We are assisting patients to improve their quality of life within their context and without removing anything from them.' All their volunteers go through nine training modules regardless of the type of service they will carry out, such as receptionist, health councillor or care giver. They assess whether these individuals have the softer skills like 'compassion': 'will they be able to provide dignified care?'

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[11] http://www.who.int/ageing/age-friendly-world/en/

The organization working with CBOs in Vietnam also focuses on staff skills: 'When we recruit them we look at how they talk about non-profits and marginalized groups. Is it disempowering? And also their ability to understand the challenges of our partners.' They also support the staff to learn and grow: 'In terms of their satisfaction as staff we give them the opportunity to evaluate whether they are supported. They are given the resources and the mentoring and support to do their work well for the organization.'

MEASURING DIGNITY

There is broad agreement about the critical importance of dignity in development but particpants concede that dignity is very difficult to measure: 'We cannot even begin to adequately describe what dignity is let alone measure it or at least not measure in quantifiable terms.' Nevertheless they recognize the need to measure it because 'what gets measured gets done'. In their struggle to measure it, there appear to be certain principles that participants insist on:

- There is a strong caution that dignity is not measured 'in a traditional sense, ie key performance indicators (KPIs)'. They prefer narrative reports to metrics, which 'give people the power to control the context of what they are saying'.
- There is a preference for the use of proxies that might indicate greater dignity such as 'confidence' and 'trust' rather than using a single measure of dignity. 'We measure various impacts that might result from dignity but not an indicator for dignity itself.'
- Finally they stress exercising sensitivity in data collection. Dignity plays a part in carrying out the evaluation work itself. 'When I observe and take photos it's my personal opinion to find the balance, show something tangible to donors but make sure in the photos I'm taking and the questions I'm asking that I still maintain their dignity,' stresses one participant.

Despite the ambiguity of the subject, three practical frameworks emerge from the discussion that participants use in the measurement of dignity.

Using the human rights framework

Some organizations use the human rights framework to assess access to individual rights, dignity and freedoms of individuals. For example the organization working for people with dementia uses the framework for an age-friendly society set out by WHO (mentioned above) to measure their work.

Integrating agency and equality as key standards in work

A community development organization in the south of Romania is improving its monitoring and evaluation systems by developing standards of work that enable agency. These standards are for themselves as well as the small groups that they are helping to create in the communities:

> 'We aim that communities and the people should lead the change and our role is to provide them support only. This is about dignity. We have developed standards for different dimensions of work coming from this kind of theory.'

Similarly, in Vietnam an organization which works with and supports other CBOs upholds the core values of respect and agency of their stakeholders: 'We are not the doers. We are the facilitators. We are not to take place of these non profits, we are to support them.' Another international organization working for the elderly also affirms that while dignity is not quantifiably measured, 'it is central to any programme being implemented by the organization'.

An international NGO based in London and working in sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia on issues of sexual health and reproductive rights also looks for agency in its evaluations as a proxy for dignity and examines whether the relationships in the development process have been respectful and equal:

> 'I wouldn't say that we explicitly measure dignity but I think we measure things that are closely related to dignity like levels of self agency, confidence, their perspectives and opinions about how the programmes we run have benefitted them? What kind of relationship they have had with the people who have been running those programmes? Whether they feel like their views and their participation has been valued and respected?'

Alluding to the unequal power relations between international and local organizations (mentioned above) as part of their evaluation some of the participants working with partners focus on equality in the relationship. One organization focuses on 'how equal they [partners] feel working together?' Another organization, in its annual surveys of its partners, has recently started to ask questions about 'whether they feel their voices are heard in our decision-making? Do they have a chance to voice decisions?' They are also asking similar questions of volunteers and donors.

Similarly in palliative care, an organization as part of its evaluation uses a tool for measuring community participation, which for them is about measuring dignity.

Capturing stories of change

Other organizations monitor dignity by capturing narratives about the changes people have undergone in their individual lives. The organization providing palliative care concurs that dignity is not visible but they do measure it at an individual level (as well as at community level, as noted above) through their 'change stories'. 'People talk about the change in their personal life that demonstrates the kind of dignity brought into their life through our interventions.' They also work with community volunteers to measure dignity in their beneficiaries.

Likewise an international grantmaker supporting community-based environmental justice issues asks the groups they support about changes in trust and confidence, looking both at the individual level and at how the individual relates to the community:

> 'With dignity we are looking at individual level change. We are asking about very hard to measure and subjective feelings about our work and community and out of that we can stipulate. For example we may see some greater dignity because people are more confident.'

They further share that 'we also get answers where the grant led to less trust and disrupted their relationship with the community. It's interesting to look at that … in such a case what happens to the dignity of the person implementing the work?'

They note that that these narratives are captured as short reports that feed into their evaluation framework.

A factorial model of dignity

While caution about capturing dignity in anything other than qualitative terms is well founded, the fact that the grants programme was captured using quantitative measures of many indicators that are normally seen as too difficult to measure offers scope for the construction of a statistical model.

As part of the evaluation strategy, organizations were asked to rate various aspects of their work, particularly their mission, methods and values, on a five-point scale (from high to low). This enables statistical modelling based on

a technique first used in the Allport-Vernon study of values (1931)[12] to investigate the concept based on our data. Six items were prima facie designed to measure the pursuit of dignity in their work. Examining the behaviour of 61 organizations, it was found that all six items inter-correlate with one another and are measuring the same single component. The extent that they are correlated with that component is given below.

Component Matrix[a]

	Correlation with component
Mission: Being a catalyst so that people can make the changes in their societies that they want	.726
Mission: Encouraging the idea that people are competent and can do things for themselves	.770
Mission: Providing an enabling environment where people can flourish	.708
Methods: Helping people participate in society so that they can advocate for a better life for themselves and their families	.705
Values: We ensure that all our actions enable the autonomy of other people so that they can make their own decisions	.572
Values: We provide support 'from below' so that people who are helped have the power to use the resources provided as they see fit	.759

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
[a] 1 components extracted.

This enables the creation of a scale of dignity based on the combined measures of these six items (known in statistics as a 'factor score'). This means that each and every organization can be rated on the factor of dignity, and this score can be correlated with other measures.

This exercise yields a reasonably well grounded theory based on evidence from empirical data rather than as a definite statement of reality. Notwithstanding its limitations, it is a good starting point for thinking and debate.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO ADVANCE THE DIGNITY LENS IN DEVELOPMENT?

- Develop markers of measurement: acknowledging that measuring dignity is a struggle, participants want more opportunities for peer learning and to clarify what markers can be used to measure dignity, what they might look like in different contexts and how other people are

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[12] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9780470479216.corpsy0038

going to go about measuring them. One suggestion for developing appropriate markers is to ask people what dignity means to them and then make it concrete. 'Ask what does living in dignity look like for you and work backwards from that.'

- Have more conversations about dignity: participants share the opinion that while dignity is critical to development it is not talked about as often as it should be. They express a need and commitment to 'have these kinds of conversations at all levels'. 'We will continue to have deeper dialogue and take more time to listen.'

- Build staff capacities: the importance of building the capacities of development staff is stressed 'so that they can recognize dignity in their work, so they can see how we can work with people in a way that is empowering'.

- Unpack dignity: there is a desire to develop a deeper understanding of dignity and its connections with development work such as the connection of dignity with inequality and with the human rights framework.

- Influence the field: there is a call to present to the field how measuring dignity will accelerate our efforts. 'We need to have buy in from all stakeholders that this (dignity) indicator is intrinsic to development.'