

**Policy Review**

**Cultural Diplomacy in the Time  
of COVID-19: Updating SDG-17  
(Partnership for Goals)**

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## **1. Introduction**

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hindered progress in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development leaving the world in despair. As a result, the world felt the need to continue working together, reconceptualising the goals, and finding actual targets in 2021. This study focuses on concept and challenges of cultural diplomacy as a mean of sustainable development. It further discusses cultural diplomacy in connection with the SDG-17 ('partnerships for the goals'). The study also suggests how to actualize its targets. SDG-17 has 19 targets (Appendix 1). This study suggests addition of 20<sup>th</sup> target with title: "encourage effective cultural diplomacy", keeping in view the current situation of the pandemic.

Pakistan is a country with rich history, diverse music and languages, different cuisines, and ancient sites like Mohenjo-daro<sup>2</sup>, and Makli Necropolis<sup>3</sup>. On the contrary, the country is known in the world for extremism, religious intolerance, border tensions especially with India on Kashmir issue, etc. A major reason for the negative image of Pakistan is global media's propaganda. In such a scenario, Pakistan needs to have a comprehensive plan and policy to promote its soft image more efficiently. The country's foreign policy needs to embed with clear-cut expressions of cultural diplomacy. In 2021, Pakistan ranked 10<sup>th</sup> most powerful country in terms of military strength (Global Firepower Index 2021); whereas it is now placed at 53<sup>rd</sup> position on the Soft Power Index (Salam 2020). Taking advantage of its rich culture, it can benefit from cultural diplomacy. Not only Pakistan can build a fair image of itself, but it can also attract more international partnerships to achieve the SDGs.

## **2. Methodology**

The study is the outcome of a panel discussion on "Cultural Diplomacy in the Times of COVID-19" organized jointly by SDPI and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on the occasion of SDPI's 23<sup>rd</sup> Sustainable Development Conference in Islamabad on December 17, 2020. The overall theme of the conference was "Sustainable Development in the Times of COVID-19". Ambassadors, and scholars from Pakistan and abroad (Appendix 2) participated in the discussion.

## **3. Cultural Diplomacy as Theory and Practice**

The idea that culture has an important role in diplomatic and international relations is not old; however, cultural diplomacy is quite new to this domain. The term is used often by politicians, diplomats, scientists, and media experts; nevertheless, still it is not clearly explained. Cultural diplomacy is intertwined with concepts such as public diplomacy, nation-branding, propaganda, digital diplomacy, and soft power. Still there are basic differences which make cultural diplomacy unique in theory and practice.

Cultural diplomacy as a type of public diplomacy means exchange of ideas, information, art, language, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples (Cummings 2003). Since a main goal of cultural diplomacy is to foster mutual understanding (Cummings 2003), it should be taken as a foreign policy tool to construct peace and develop cooperation among nations. According to Lenczowski (2009), cultural diplomacy may be defined as the use of various elements of culture to influence "foreign publics, opinion makers, and even foreign leaders". These cultural aspects are: art and crafts, education, ideas, history, science, medicine, technology, religion, customs, norms, commerce, philanthropy, sports, language, professional vocations, hobbies, and various media productions. Although cultural diplomacy as an element of public diplomacy and national security policy can assist the states

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<sup>2</sup> An archaeological site in Sindh that was built around 2500 BCE. It was an ancient city of Indus Valley civilization.

<sup>3</sup> One of the largest funerary sites in the world, built over the course of 400 years in Thatta district, Sindh. Though built during 14<sup>th</sup> century, but it gained fame in Mughal era between 1570 and 1640 CE when the most architecturally designed tombs were built there.

and can be integrated in information policy, countering hostile propaganda, and establishing relationships of trust, still many countries of the world neglect to apply it. Lenczowski (2009) argues that the nature of principal perspectives in policy making in the defence and traditional diplomatic communities are the reasons of this gap.

In the time of crisis, such as pandemic, it is the CD that assists the governments to share preventive and therapeutic experiences, construct trust among and within the nations and create a cultural image (which may reflect good governance and transparency) worldwide. As the EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) and the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) made it clear in the time of crisis international communities are more in need to use new aspects of CD such as “digital diplomacy” (ASEF 2020) and “digital cooperation” (EUNIC 2020).

## **4. Discussion and Analysis**

Policy makers need to consider three main points regarding preparing an efficient cultural diplomacy, especially in crisis time, i.e.

- Rethinking advantages of CD
- Key role of culture in international cooperation for development
- Challenges of CD

### **4.1 Rethinking Advantages of Cultural Diplomacy**

Accelerating cultural relations, benefiting from digitalization, improving strategic communication, and enhancing health diplomacy are among the main advantages of CD.

#### **4.1.1 Promotion of Cultural Relations and moving from self- to value-promotion**

In view of Anupama Sekhar, one of the panelists, COVID-19 has further accelerated the process of digitalization as well as cultural relations. In 2020, several digital cultural initiatives were taken, which suggest that cultural exchange’s directions in future are much diverse and broader. She reminded that countries always try to positively influence other countries’ publics and even leaders by presenting their soft power through their movies, sending their artists abroad to perform, promoting tourism and trade, setting up regular channels for cultural exchange, including partnership and trade. Since 2010, a new term, ‘cultural relations’, is being used increasingly that means showcasing relations through cultural diplomacy and cultural exchange by opening doors and providing access to international artists and cultural professionals. Since then, cultural diplomacy has been opting for a new direction and countries are entering the frame. The most classic example is the Korean Wave<sup>4</sup>; the K-pop or Korean soap operas are some of the examples of power of cultural diplomacy. Besides, governments, new players such as private foundations, civil society networks and organizations play a very important part alongside countries in cultural diplomacy.

Witnessing the rise of multilateralism in the last decade and the current pandemic crisis combined with the “vaccine nationalism”, Sekhar predicted that there might be some sudden setbacks in achieving multilateralism. Bilateral relations have always been the cornerstone of cultural diplomacy, but this new form of multilateral engagement has several advantages. For instance, members of the European Union National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC)<sup>5</sup> started working together more intensively. Sekhar further said that slowly there is a shift towards cultural relations, moving from “self-promotion” to “values promotion”. Values of mutuality and respect for partners of communication are equally appreciated. The term cultural relations is not about artists from a certain country going to perform in another country, it is about artists from two countries collaborating to establish benefits for both sides. The Asia-

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<sup>4</sup> The Korean wave means "wave/flow of Korea" refers to the increase in global popularity of South Korean culture since the 1980s.

<sup>5</sup> EUNIC – European Union National Institutes for Culture – is a European network of organizations engaging in cultural relations, concentrates on cultural collaboration in more than 90 countries worldwide with a network of over 120 clusters, drawing on the broad experience of the members from all EU Member States and associate countries.

Europe Foundation (ASEF), which is essentially an organization promoting multilateral cultural activities, tries to fill these gaps in cultural relations. For instance, the website of ASEF culture360<sup>6</sup> helps many artists in South Asia and other areas of the world. There is a need to increase mutual understanding among peoples especially during this pandemic, mutual conversations, and partnerships for development, Sekhar concluded (personal communication 2020).

#### **4.1.2 Benefiting from Digitalization based on long-term Cultural Activities and Infrastructure**

The next advantage of cultural diplomacy is its flexible character and blurry definition as discussed above, which makes the optimal use of digitalisation possible in crisis time. One of the golden ages of digital diplomacy has been the pandemic period. Nevertheless, Bernhard Schlagheck, another panelist, was skeptic that (building) trust, which is a main aim of CD, can be maintained virtually. He reminded that a foreign cultural policy with long-term projects and deep-rooted cultural infrastructure, can use digitalization efficiently as a tool of cultural diplomacy. Digitalization cannot be of great help to cultural diplomacy of countries, which have had no profound face-to-face cultural partnerships internationally. Trust between Germany and Pakistan, Schlagheck (who also is the German ambassador in Pakistan) said, can be built firstly after long-term partnerships of German organizations<sup>7</sup> in Pakistan. During the COVID-19 pandemic, German embassy continued the cooperation in cultural fields with Pakistani partners through digital means, not broadly, but still some projects could be continued. Without cultural infrastructures, cultural diplomacy could not be continued during the pandemic, reminds the German ambassador to Pakistan. Stating that the culture is a sort of antidote in a crisis like COVID-19 pandemic, Schlagheck argued that it is overoptimistic to believe that in times of crisis, countries need to focus more on culture: “Soft power certainly remains important; nevertheless, crisis situation prioritizes health, social policies, and financial circumstances. One can say policies in time of crisis are no antidote without culture, because culture may contribute significantly to ease psychological consequences of the pandemic. This is how cultural diplomacy comes on board. Although digitalization was important before, the crisis certainly and distinctively accelerated its development through new forms of cultural diplomacy” (personal communication 2020). He then clarifies that embassy in Islamabad celebrated the German National Day on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2020. It was totally a digital event. Digital diplomacy can function as effective and successful as traditional forms of cultural diplomacy when diplomats rely on the ground and be experienced in the non-digital cultural relations. In this regard, German embassy in Pakistan as in many other countries in South and Southeast Asia has advantages because of long-term cultural relationships and partnerships. Schlagheck further emphasized that not solely culture but economic relationships too are important to keep countries committed to partnerships for development: “German businesses are also keen to back up their commercial interests within community-related often cultural engagement, so they pull into the same direction” (personal communication 2020). The German ambassador concluded with two points: firstly, it is necessary to include global issues such as climate change to targets of cultural diplomacy; and secondly, it is vital to have independent organizations implementing activities for cultural diplomacy activities. Citing example of the German foreign cultural policy, he said there is a separation between diplomatic missions abroad and German cultural institutions. The German federal government and parliament are obligated to finance them (partly or completely, different case to case) but are not allowed to interfere in organizing or leading their projects.

#### **4.1.3 Strategic Communications during Infodemic**

Bilal Zubair, another panelist, said digitalization could help China in information-sharing during the pandemic. China in the last decade tried to promote its soft power and cultural diplomacy, but these came under stress due to

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<sup>6</sup> The website [culture360.asef.org](http://culture360.asef.org) is an internet platform gives opportunity to users from Asia and Europe to get closer by providing information, facilitating dialogue and stimulating reflection on the arts and culture of the two regions. It is a portal managed by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) since 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) or German Academic Exchange Service); Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (IFA) or Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations); the Goethe Institute, Pakistan.

infodemic<sup>8</sup> and uncertainty about the COVID-19. The strategic communication assisted China to work on challenges in tackling COVID-19 misinformation. Strategic communication focuses on communication-based engagement with a foreign audience to understand their opinion, grievances, concerns and attitudes. COVID-19 has lessened the chances of people-to-people contacts so that diplomats might rely more on communication employing new methods. In Zubair's view, the main problem China has faced during this pandemic was increase in rumours against China being responsible for the outbreak, which undermined its credibility. Some sources of cultural diplomacy, including exchange programmes, Confucius institutes, cultural events and cuisines were already impaired during the pandemic. However, the key action of China was to build a strategic communication to engage itself more with the foreign audience. The strategic communication plays a vital role in encountering the misinformation coming from other countries as well. China efficiently shared data and incorporated many ways of diplomacy also by promising provision of Chinese vaccine when they invent it, adds Zubair (personal communication 2020). These were some steps that China took in response to the allegations. The COVID-19 tested the humanity with a great challenge which needs to be tackled by mutual co-ordination between states. As there was a lack of co-ordination and partnership at international level, therefore, communication linkages and digitalization can provide more clarity between government institutions and public. COVID-19 reinforces the need for cross-sectoral coordination and partnership, and enhancement of linkages for global peace, Zubair concluded (personal communication 2020).

#### **4.1.4 Enhancing Health Diplomacy**

The next advantage of CD is its flexibility to hold objectives such as exchange in "medicine" (John Lenczowski 2009). Some countries added or promoted health diplomacy<sup>9</sup> to continue CD in the pandemic time. Rubina Ali, another panelist, argued that health diplomacy has been a way that China used to promote its cultural image worldwide. China has combined cultural and digital initiatives with its medical aids, through initiatives like Health Silk Road. Reminding dimensions of health diplomacy such as negotiating governance, improving relations through health, creating alliance for health outcomes, and contributing to peace and security, she claims that health diplomacy becomes very important during this pandemic, because the virus has been a global issue. China smartly focused on health diplomacy to demonstrate that its diplomacy aims at providing peace and security for the whole world. China extended the health diplomacy alongside its already existed mega projects such as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In January 2021, "138 countries have joined the BRI by signing Memorandums of Understanding with China (Nedopil 2021). Therefore, a huge regional population (including Pakistan) is engaged in this project, which has broadened the reach of Chinese health diplomacy consequently. She concludes that China's health diplomacy considers the point of partnership for development. Through the Health and Silk Road project of BRI, China has strengthened its national policy in addition to improving its image in worldwide, said Ali (personal communication 2020).

#### **4.2 Key Role of Culture in International Cooperation for Development**

COVID-19 has made us realize that only a developed medical system alone cannot help control pandemics and something more in the comity of nations is required to overcome global crises. In this context, culture performs as a heart of international cooperation. Therefore, promotion of cultural relations is needed to reach goals of development and focus on international challenges.

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<sup>8</sup> Infodemic is a portmanteau of "information" and "epidemic". It refers to a rapid and far-reaching spread of both accurate and inaccurate information about a disease.

<sup>9</sup> Health diplomacy is a form of diplomacy, which refers to the provision of medical assistance or aid for the purpose of furthering national goals abroad. It is a form of soft power.

### **4.2.1 Cultural ties vital for Reaching Development Goals**

Cultural diplomacy is a way to promote mutual understanding through and within different cultural contexts. According to Daryl Copeland, another panelist, people regardless of nationality and socioeconomic class “desperately need mutual understanding in the time of pandemic” (personal communication 2020). Economy, health care system or even science and technology alone cannot help resolve the new problems of humanity. It is essential to make trust through cultural relationship and work together for an efficient solution. He maintains that “the easy way is to put aside cultural activities or replace them with aid projects; however, it is rational to take the difficult way, which is a sustainable way”. Reminding that one day the world will get out of the current situation, he said cultural work is fundamental to construct relationships of the countries: “Culture in international cooperation is like wheels of a car. Cooperation is really the only way to go ahead,” (personal communication 2020).

Copeland, the author of *Guerrilla Diplomacy: Rethinking International Relations* (2009), said science and culture are undervalued at so many levels for different reasons. They are both important vectors of soft power. The COVID-19 has proved that “there are no military solutions to wicked problems. There is no tool for the promotion of science and culture when it comes to enlarging empathy to encourage people-to-people contacts. These are sources of activity that we should weave into a fabric of civilization. There is too much emphasis on hard power and military and too little emphasis on soft power such as culture and science” (personal communication 2020). Highlighting the need to build coordination and partnerships in cultural and science diplomacy, Copeland concludes that countries of the world must strengthen their economies in such a manner that people can taste the fruit of development goals. If development is not long-term and human centric, then it cannot be called development.

### **4.2.2 Linking Cultural Diplomacy with Environmental Issues**

Hamayoun Khan, another panellist, said cultural diplomacy promotes partnership for conserving freshwater and addressing the issues of climate change. He believed that cultural diplomacy is not only done by diplomats but also businesspersons, civil society members and university teachers. He further added that there are different international programmes through which each country has a chance to inform others about their own culture, show others their manufacturing capacity through presenting local foods, clothes, and handicrafts. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 limitation has made cultural actors rethink the traditional aspects of cultural diplomacy. It makes humans realize the importance of the culture in even everyday life and the need to more empathetic and look towards cooperation rather than competition. However, the world has witnessed quite the opposite when Donald Trump, the former US president, terminated relationship with the World Health Organization (WHO), in the world body fighting the pandemic. It is time to make humans realize that climate change and environmental issues are central phenomenon and if the world together fails to come to a common solution, they can face more dangerous times in future as COVID-19 is not going to be the last. Against this backdrop, cultural diplomacy should not only focus on cultural aspects of national identities but also on universal and global challenges such as conservation of freshwater and climate change. The world needs to work together. There would always be a competition as it is already in the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccine to world population; nevertheless, a healthy competition is also the need of hour. State and civil society actors need to accept that the final solution is in making partnership to achieve the development goals, Hamayoun concluded (personal communication, 2020).

## **4.3 Challenges of Cultural Diplomacy**

Challenges and obstacles of CD in the time of COVID-19 are frequent. However, two impotent ones are: rise of identitarianism, and the threat of conspiracy theories.

### **4.3.1 Rise of Identitarianism**

Andreas Stadler, another panelist, said the rise of Identitarianism in Europe is a serious challenge to cultural relations. Identitarianism has been a reaction to the political ideologies like multiculturalism and liberalism, which shaped the identity of Europeans in different ways. Although the ideology was formulated in the 1960s and onwards, it has attracted attention of right-wing parties in Germany, Austria and beyond in the last decade (personal communication 2020).



Despite the fact that identitarianism can be observed all over the world, the passive role of the US in leading action against the COVID-19 and its withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation illustrates that this ideology has more harmful effect to cultural image of the West.

“The cultural cooperation and mutual understanding are challenged by identitarianism, which pushed against what was celebrated before: multiculturalism. It was only 10 to 15 years ago when no one was questioning whether multiculturalism is a proper ideology to shape the international relations. Cultural diversity was respected, and civic-ethnic integration was appreciated. All of a sudden, many countries started considering multiculturalism dangerous, disturbing, and harmful to their own identities,” (Stadler, personal communication 2020).

Warning that the idea of exclusion is becoming more and more important in the USA and parts of the Europe, he quoted the Charter of UNESCO 1946 as it reads:

“The purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world without distinction of race, sex, language or religion.”

Stadler termed this charter as the solid foundation of international relations to (re)construct cultural partnerships in the world. Reminding that cultural partnership is nowadays on the lower end of hierarchies in disciplines of international relations, he said that the ideology of realism comes first, and antagonism replaces ideas that support international cooperation for development. On the one hand, antagonism is everywhere (i.e., between the USA and China, between the USA and Russia, in the Pacific, in Europe, e.g., between Russia and Ukraine and between Armenia and Azerbaijan). On the other hand, humanity faces a huge migration and refugee crisis.

Stadler warns that the hierarchy of disciplines in international relations is going to be imbalanced. In a world which needs mutual understanding, the topics such as military, political supremacy and identitarianism are “first”, said Stadler (personal communication 2020). Governments and diplomats are expected to come back with good argument and focus on UNESCO’s charter. There is a need to promote cultural diplomacy, initiate academic and scientific exchanges, and enhance mutual understanding, mitigate antagonism, and reinvent values of intercultural dialogue (e.g., tolerance, respect to cultural diversity, active listening), concluded Stadler (personal communication 2020).

### **4.3.2 Conspiracy Theory and Misinformation**

The second challenge to CD in time of COVID-19 is the conspiracy theories that created a negative image of the countries, which have been actively promoting their soft power. Dr Sehrish Qayyum debated that the COVID-19 pandemic has been followed by variety of conspiracy theories. Among them, three are most important.

1. being a Chinese lab-created virus
2. being a super spreader to institutionalize power of 5G network
3. being a creation followed by involvement of Bill Gates to control the world (seen as a biological war tactic of the United States against China)

Qayyum maintained that these theories put a deep impact on testing global counter-crises framework, affecting peacekeeping missions and humanitarian aids under a high impact range on conflict-ridden states.

The impact of conspiracy theories has been so wide that even the WHO launched an E-platform to encounter the misinformation in time of the pandemic. As the world responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, we face the challenge of an overabundance of information related to the virus (World Health Organization 2020).

Believing in conspiracy theories is different and wide in the world. According to a survey done by Gallup, March-August 2020, 32% Pakistanis believe that the coronavirus is a foreign conspiracy (Gallup 2020). According to a Pew Research Centre survey, a quarter of American adults (who have heard about conspiracy theories) see at least some truth in these conspiracy theories. About 5% believe that it is definitely true and 20% say it is probably true (Mitchell et al. 2020). In Arab countries, misinformation relating to the pandemic has been diverse. A study shows acceptance rates for COVID-19 and influenza vaccines in Jordan and Kuwait has been 29.4% and 30.9% respectively. Beliefs that COVID-19 vaccines are intended to inject microchips into recipients and that the vaccines are related to infertility were found in 27.7% and 23.4% of respondents respectively (Sallam et al. 2021). According to a study on COVID-19 posts from 250 million users of Sino-Weibo (an application popular in China), January 1 - April 30, 2020, the spread of conspiracy theory in America and China has been different. Conspiracy theories related to 5G, the bogus documentary *Pandemic*, and Bill Gates were prevalent in America. But they were not popular on Sino-Weibo (4.95%). Widespread conspiracy theories on Weibo spotlighted on whether COVID-19 was deliberately made as a bioweapon by the U.S., China, Japan or another country (Chen et al. 2020).

Spread of conspiracy theory should alert governments, policy makers and diplomats about the importance of cautious fact checking. Conspiracy theories, in the short-term, benefit the governments that do not have an efficient policy to control the virus. In this way, people's attention is drawn towards the imaginary source of the virus instead of the inefficiency of the own control policies. In the long run, belief in conspiracy theories is harmful. It can make a pattern for people to believe in misinformation about the government's policies as well. The enriched pattern of belief in misinformation can eradicate "mutual understanding" and "trust" in a worldwide level. This gap cannot be recovered easily. As Qayyum analysed cultural diplomacy with emphasizing on the fact that no culture is superior to others, should arrange opportunities for education, art, and music exchange with and for other countries; "the CD should be seen as a counteraction against conspiracy theory in the time of crisis" (personal communication 2020).

## **5. Conclusion: Cultural Diplomacy as a Target to Achieve SDG-17**

Cultural diplomacy is a practice to enable countries communicate with the people of other countries and shape their minds for achieving their own national goals through exchange of ideas, art, language, and other aspects of own culture. There are studies, according to which, the concept of CD is blurry for some reasons, including its fuzzy character and similarities to soft power and propaganda. What is common among almost all academic debates is that the focus of CD should be shifted from the definition to outcomes. Cultural activities, which lead cosmopolitan inclusion and peaceful pluralism, should be understood as examples of cultural diplomacy.

Regarding the necessity of CD especially in time of pandemic/crisis, three main points were discussed in this paper:

1. rethinking advantages of CD
2. key role of culture in international cooperation for development
3. challenges of CD

The common point of the analysis has been the main role of CD as a tool or a chance to mobilize countries for "partnership" to achieve the SDG-17.

This study suggests that cultural diplomacy should be considered a priority area to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalization of the global partnership for sustainable development. The SDGs can only be achieved if countries work together. It is true that international investments and financial cooperation are needed to boost socio-economic development in matters of fair trade, market access, and educational collaboration. However, it should not forget that sustainable development requires innovative methods and investments to promote cultures. To build a better world, humans need to be supportive, empathetic, and cooperative. There are 19 targets in the way of achieving SDG-17 (Appendix 1). None of the targets focus on culture. The study hence suggests a target 20 should be incorporated in SDG-17 under title: "encourage effective cultural diplomacy".

The legitimacy attached to cultural diplomacy and global partnerships in the context of sustainable development still needs to be examined by researchers and academics; however, based on views which are discussed in this study, cultural diplomacy should be taken as a policy to pursue development all over the world.

## 6. Recommendations

- There is a need to bring cultural diplomacy close to the heart of public policy by producing more research and policy papers so as to advise the government.
- The government should increase reporting on internal cultural matters to illustrate peaceful experience of multicultural society. For instance, cultural activities carried out for Afghan refugees in Pakistan should be highlighted. Outcomes of cultural activities which integrate refugees into Pakistani culture can promote the overall image of Pakistan worldwide.
- The government should open the doors for new players such as private foundations, civil society networks and NGOs to play a role in cultural diplomacy of Pakistan. The aim of building a cultural image for Pakistan can be achieved by different cultural actors reflecting diverse dimensions and dynamics of the culture, not a specific ideology or a certain political discourse.
- The government needs to take measures to move from traditional/classic cultural activities or “self-promotion” abroad to an active actor which struggle for promoting “values” like human quality and multiculturalism. To counter the global biased media coverage on Pakistan, Pakistani diplomats should be trained to benefit from the activities of cultural actors, who highlight diversity of Pakistani culture and how to integrate it with multiculturalism.
- Learning from the experience of COVID-19 and limitation of face-to-face cultural relationships, the government should increase dynamics of digitalization for diplomatic activities.
- The government needs to construct long-term cultural relationships with other countries. Continuity in cultural relations is very important. The countries which have rich cultural infrastructures (like Goethe Institute) continued their cultural relations in times of crisis abroad, because of having some backgrounds in mission countries. Digitalization can be a great help to CD when cultural relationship is already there.
- Learning from Chinese way of strategic communication and health diplomacy in times of COVID-19, Pakistan should invest on more research to strengthen its foreign cultural policy and build a relevant discourse on cultural diplomacy for the country.
- COVID-19 attests that having a great military and economy of the world, is alone not relevant in new challenges of the world. Emphasis on hard power and military is simply too much whereas there is a little emphasis on soft power and culture’s role in international relations. The development organizations should take this lesson into account constructively. They are expected to actualize targets of the SDG-17 (partnership for goals) and rethink to add a new target “encourage effective cultural diplomacy”.

- A lesson from COVID-19, which should shape policy decisions in Pakistan and elsewhere is to bring environmental issues to the heart of all activities, including culture. The policy makers of the world, including Pakistan, are expected to include not only cultural aspects of national identities in their cultural diplomacy but also universal and global challenges such as freshwater and climate change.
- Rise of Identitarianism is not only limited to the USA and Europe but also to the whole world. It is a reaction to multiculturalism and liberalism in the rest of the world as well. Identitarianism is a contest, even a danger, whether in Europe or Pakistan. This is dangerous to support political interests of a particular racial (e.g., white), or religious group (e.g., Sunni Muslims) because then there would be no dynamics for mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue to develop the world sustainably. Development at first needs empathy. Identitarianism is against empathy. The world's policy makers, including Pakistanis, are expected to create mechanism for educating different target groups in relation to UNESCO charter 1946.
- Conspiracy theories make a wrong habit and pattern of believing in misinformation. It can promote violent extremism, reduce critical thinking and lessen people's trust upon their governments. Above all, conspiracy theory can destroy objective understanding of different cultures and lead to failure of global partnership to achieve the goals of development. Therefore, policy makers, academia and media should first investigate and confirm the fact before reaching any conclusion.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1:

**Title of Session: Cultural Diplomacy in the Times of COVID-19**

**Introductory Remarks:** Hamayoun Khan, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Islamabad

### **Speakers:**

- Anupama Sekhar, Cultural Department, Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), Singapore
- H.E. Andreas Stadler, Austrian Ambassador to Malta & Guest Professor, University of Vienna and University of Applied Arts
- H.E. Bernhard Schlagheck, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, Islamabad
- Daryl Copeland, CGAI and CERIU, UMon, Canada (Vlog)
- Dr Sehrish Qayyum, Punjab University, Lahore, Pakistan
- Bilal Zubair, SPIR, Quaid-i-Azam (QAU), Islamabad
- Rubina Ali, International Islamic University, Islamabad

**Moderator/Discussant:** Dr Fatemeh Kamali-Chirani, SDPI, Islamabad

**Appendix 2:**  
**Current Targets of SDG-17**

There are 19 targets which clarify how SDG-17 of sustainable development, partnership for goals, can be achieved. The targets are as follows:

- 17.1: Mobilize Resources to Improve Domestic Revenue Collection
- 17.2: Implement All Development Assistance Commitments
- 17.3: Mobilize Financial Resources for Developing Countries
- 17.4: Assist Developing Countries in Attaining Debt Sustainability
- 17.5: Invest in Least Developed Countries
- 17.6: Knowledge Sharing and Cooperation for Access to Science, Technology, and Innovation
- 17.7: Promote Sustainable Technologies to Developing Countries
- 17.8: Strengthen the Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity for Least Developed Countries
- 17.9: Enhance SDG Capacity in Developing Countries
- 17.10: Promote a Universal Trading System under the WTO
- 17.11: Increase the Exports of Developing Countries
- 17.12: Remove Trade Barriers for Least Developed Countries
- 17.13: Enhance Global Macroeconomic Stability
- 17.14: Enhance Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development
- 17.15: Respect National Leadership to Implement Policies for the Sustainable Development Goals
- 17.16: Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development
- 17.17: Encourage Effective Partnerships
- 17.18: Enhance Availability of Reliable Data
- 17.19: Further Develop Measurements of Progress

(Source: Punjab SDGs Support Unit n.d.)