

STRATEGIC RESEARCH AND ACTION FOR EMERGING GLOBAL CHALLENGES



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People everywhere understand that our world is entering a time of critical change. There are emerging global challenges and crises rampant all around us and short-term solutions are not in sight. Many of the leading challenges to our planet's sustainability, global security and socio-economic prosperity at the dawn of the twenty-first century include climate change, projected shortages of water and food sources, dwindling energy reserves, pandemics and various human threats those including nuclear proliferation, internal riots, non-state terrorist activity, illicit trafficking, widening income inequality, and so forth. These threats are not just in a particular country, they are prevalent worldwide. Moreover, since economic downturn has taken a toll across the globe, repercussions are widespread. In view of the current scenario, common concerns and shared ideas need to be deliberated collaboratively. We are in urgent need of social scientists and intellectuals who understand that with rapid knowledge obsolescence in the information age, the uncertain future necessitates a strategic approach for facilitating human development worldwide. The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon recently mentioned that the achievement and continuation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), can only be achieved through Partnerships.

We need to redefine the purpose of education and research in a strategic perspective. It is widely known that the pen is mightier than the sword. Education can bridge our worlds, it can even divide our worlds, and History proves that applied research in most fields can either bring prosperity or calamity on the human race. Strategic research and action has to be defined organizationally in overcoming the myriad security issues facing our future worlds. A new organization has been established in 2010, to create a global network for strategic research and action. The Global Challenges Forum Foundation (GFFF) is perhaps the first international organization established with a unique mission to address emerging challenges of a globalized world. It explores applied policy research on security challenges and threats and facilitating the exchange of multidisciplinary experiences at the interface of globalization and security. The GFFF forum themes focus on major challenges today including Education, Energy, Economics, Sustainable Development and Maritime Security. However, organizational outlook to the bleak scenario is totally different. The Global Challenges Forum envisions challenges as 'opportunities' to develop 'solutions' by building partnerships with strategic organizations across the world. It aspires to develop solutions cooperatively through integrated, holistic, 'bottom-up' approaches arrived upon by all stakeholders, to influence 'top down' policies. It thereby functions as a 'strategic think tank' to advise different academic institutes, business houses and even governments.

The functional process by which this is being achieved is distinct. The GFFF, Geneva is establishing, Global Partnership Research Centers* (GPRC's). Currently, these exist in a few

countries with the network growing. The GPRC's will create a national and international network of partner members from all levels of academia, business, research, government and non-government sectors to facilitate integration of all stakeholders around the world through annual Multi Stakeholder Forums (MSF's). The GPRC's tap the expertise of policy makers, business leaders, educationists, scientists, engineers and professionals around the world to collate and analyze market or existing research information to undertake related projects in different countries. Educational Forums are interactive face-to-face platforms where latest research information is processed. Here knowledge transfer through case-studies and intense deliberations are continuous and active processes. A cross-spectrum of representatives from varied fields and institutions are represented. This is the most effective way of reaching a consensus which can influence all stakeholders positively. Feedback deliberated is collated into an action plan. The GPRC's assist with promoting reforms in educational initiatives, international accreditation, independent projects and higher education partnerships. On request, they offer feedback to influence various local non-government and government agencies or matters of public policy. The final outcomes will be finally deliberated to reach definite solutions and policies during the Global Partnership Summit hosted annually by the GFFF. This provides a very high level platform to influence decision making worldwide in aspects of commerce, sustainable development, social welfare, education or public policy and essential for shaping our world in the future.

The GPRC's also foster cross-cultural educational programmes or international partnerships to bridge the gap between different countries. The GPRC's have international offices in different countries which 'cross-talk' to facilitate better understanding amidst their partner members during the global forums and the global partnership summit. This could promote peace and harmony in a strategic manner. Moreover, for several years, challenges have been battled 'bottom up' in society, with the common layman having to face severe repercussions of social challenges for generations together. This situation will now radically change. The GPRC's provide a unique opportunity to connect across a cross spectrum of personalities in society. The forums provide a 'voice' for those who are striving to be heard. The forums voice dialogue and build relationships between the common man and decision makers, albeit strategically. Host nations that fail to hear the poignant heart cry of the masses will continue to fight a losing battle, addressing challenges without strategic support and guidance. Though, nations will consider GPRC's as beneficial institutions offering strategic advice to ensure national interest and global security. The GPRC's publish articles, research papers, newsletters, and conference proceedings and media reports. They collaborate with eminent publication houses and media agencies, in host countries, to announce its deliberations and resolutions. Leadership role of the Media will be given utmost importance. The forums thus have the ability to positively influence a community 'top down' as it is usually people occupy positions of public or corporate governance that influence society maximally.

It is necessary to reflect on a strategic case study of one of the main GFFF forums the "Transformative Education Forum". This forum was established as a majority of global citizens are uneducated; moreover, the general consensus was that a new

paradigm was needed for educating 21st century learners. The TEF objective is to help define holistic reforms in outdated education systems, practices and policies to revamp older, obsolete models of human learning. Education has the ability to influence sustainable development worldwide particularly in developing countries. TEF was organized successfully by the GFFF for three consecutive years in Geneva in 2010, in the U.S. in 2011, and in India in 2012. TEF was well attended by distinguished delegates including leaders, heads of institutions, educators, and a cross-spectrum of reputed stakeholders representing public and private education, research, business, media and information technology industry. TEF 2011, hosted by the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, California was successful in elucidating the "TEF Principles" which provide significant guidelines for new educational models for the 21st century. TEF 2012, particularly, was a great success story of a synergic initiative between the ACTS Group of Institutions and GCF Foundation. The forum was organized by Dr. Ken Gnanakan (President, ACTS) and Dr. Moses Satralkar (GCF) from 12-15 Sep 2012 at Alliance de Francaise, Bangalore. Since India has the largest population of illiterate people as compared to any other nation in the world, the cause for concern is unequivocal. TEF has been acknowledged as need of the hour especially as the theme 'Transformative Education for Sustainable Development' is pertinent. National Media played a leadership role in co-hosting the forum and creating public awareness. Strong solidarity was expressed by a all stakeholders with feedback from participants highlighting urgent need for reforms in educational practices and public policies in India. TEF has been very successful in sharing international best practices, effective case studies, fostering collaborations, discussing the current scenario and outlining specific recommendations for nation building.

Most importantly, to realize the strategic mandate of the GFFF, the Association for Strategic Research and Action, Geneva (ASRAGENEVA) has been formally established by Dr. Talal Abu Gazeleh (Jordan), Chairman GFFF and Dr. Walter Christian (USA), Founding Director GFFF, as a prestigious membership-based organization, under the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland. It will serve as a federation of 'think tanks'. The memberships at ASRAGENEVA augment possibilities for dialogue and strategic policies, business networking, flexible projects, partnerships and conferences. Academic Institutions, Colleges, Universities, International Baccalaureate Schools, Research Institutions, Business Organizations, Industries' Corporations, Banks, Media and Publication Houses, Non Government Organizations and Private Firms as well as State or Central Government Organizations are welcome to join as fee paying members. Funding Agencies, Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives and Sponsor's are welcome to collaborate since long-term benefits are tremendous with social objectives being met. The General Assembly meetings and Plenary Sessions will be convened regularly. ASRAGENEVA membership is affordable, has broad scope, develops leadership influence and is a mutually beneficial association. Strategic advice provided by the ASRAGENEVA to governments, public or private organizational boards, will definitely have long term positive impact in overcoming various global challenges in future.

Views expressed by author are personal

The Life Flow



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Modern Life is a quest for opulence, Human nature craves for more and still more. This insatiable craving of man has changed life equation. It has become our habit

THE BLISS OF GIVING

to expect and accept. This is a new norm that challenges the time tested societal norm of giving rather than seeking. Every society in the world is founded on the cardinal principles of sharing and caring. These priceless values are threatened today as never before. One is reminded of the growing significance of the words of Sir Winston Churchill:

We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.

Society feeds on love. Love springs forth with acceptance. Acceptance is all

about treating others with dignity. Human dignity holds the key to one's high self esteem. Today's generations are up against a challenge. They are gradually losing the habit of giving. They seem to be grossly oblivious of the bliss of giving. Though, it is heartening they are growing self-reliant and self-confident. But they need to be sensitized on the growing need for sharing with others what they have. Cooperation and coordination form modern day lingo. This is the way forward both in personal and professional life. How could one

appreciate the value of giving? Should the person not grow affluent first? These are some quizzical questions. The need of the hour is to rediscover oneself. You need to get back to your lineage. No one exists in isolation. You are a part and parcel of larger whole. You are not just a living skeleton. You are more than what meets the naked eyes. The true challenge lies in knowing who you are. Once you know the nature of yourself, your thought process would expand. You will find yourself in sync with the

Universal Source. That source symbolizes abundance. Nature is a living manifestation of the Eternal Bliss. The goal of life must be to live in agreement with this Life Force. The irony is we are deliberately moving away from our roots and complain of getting uprooted. William Wordsworth, a high priest of Nature could foresee this human predicament way back in the 19th century:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers

Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

It is time we got reconnected. Human life is profound. We need to take a legitimate pride in our existence. Abundance is our true nature. We must behave as the progeny of the rich and mighty. It is our nature to give and bless. Life is a rare opportunity to grow kind and pour our heart out. The best way to do that is to practice the art of giving others what Lord has given us. The more we give, the more will come back. Our life will be filled with blessings untold. This is the law of Life. Giving is the magnet that attracts Bliss both human and Divine! And Life will flow!

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