Common-Interest Building:
Training Game with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

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Introduction

The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a gift to humanity because they are inclusive at local-global levels across generations, with implementation limited only by our imagination (Fig. 1). As a result, all eight billion[1] of us can find relevance and inspiration among the 17 SDGs. This observation reveals the SDGs as a pedagogical playground for next-generation leaders to learn negotiation skills with common-interest building – in contrast to conflict resolution – and so emerged the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME.



Figure 1. UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs) with international, transdisciplinary and inclusive relevance to balance economic prosperity, societal well-being and environmental protection at local-to-global levels.[2]

Inclusion is an underlying challenge we each address across our lifetimes, which means there

is an opportunity to be inclusive with lifelong learning. All humans are taught six fundamental **elements of inclusion** as children in every language and culture across the Earth. These six elements are the questions: who, what, when, where, why and how.

The skill to be inclusive starts with questions. In turn, questions build common interests with natural sciences, social sciences and Indigenous knowledge to make decisions that respond to change. Ultimately, this transdisciplinary process integrates research into action to make informed decisions that operate across a 'continuum of urgencies'. Informed decisionmaking (Fig. 2) is the context of the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME.



Figure 2. PYRAMID OF INFORMED DECISIONMAKING reflects the international, transdisciplinary and inclusive skills, methods and theory to produce **informed decisions**, operating across a 'continuum of urgencies' short-to-long term at personal-to-planetary levels as a scalable process "for the benefit of all on Earth across generations". Informed decisionmaking is the engine of science diplomacy as a language of hope, building common interests among allies and adversaries alike by triangulating education, research and leadership.[3-5]

How to Play the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME

The objective of the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME is for a team to justify a single SDG as the *umbrella SDG*, overarching the capacities to implement all 17 SDGs (Fig. 1). The outcome is an informed decision made with inclusion (who, what, when, where, why and how) by building common interests (Fig. 2).

Rule: Any of the 17 SDGs can serve as the *umbrella SDG*.

Step 1: Form a team. It can be small (2-10) or large (>25).

Step 2: Each team member chooses any 3 of the 17 SDGs (Fig. 1) by personal decision.

Step 3: All individual selections of 3 SDGs are shared with the team and recorded in a prepared spreadsheet that totals all selections from the team across the 17 SDGs (Fig. 3).

Step 4: Initiate the team dialogue to discover the umbrella SDG, addressing questions (who, what, when, where, why and how) from team members iteratively, with voting as appropriate, ultimately to produce an informed decision (Fig. 2) justified by the team based on their common interests.

NAME		SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL (SDG) - SEE FIGURE 1																
First name	Surname	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Name 1a	Name 1b			1	1									1				
Name 2a	Name 2b		1											1			1	
Name 3a	Name 3b	1	1	1														
Name 4a	Name 4b	1						1		1								
Name 5a	Name 5b			1										1			1	
Name 6a	Name 6b	1		1										1				
Name 7a	Name 7b		1				1										1	
Name 8a	Name 8b	1			1					1								
Name 9a	Name 9b			1						1				1				
Name 10a	Name 10b			1						1						1		
20-May-21	**Total**	**4**	**3**	**6**	**2**	**0**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**4**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**5**	**0**	**1**	**3**	**0**

Figure 3. COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME spreadsheet example from the UNITED NATIONS DIPLOMACY 4.0 TRAINING PROGRAMME with MODULE 6 (SCIENCE DIPLOMACY), hosted by the UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH (UNITAR 2022) during the six-week session in Spring 2021. Each spreadsheet is prepared in advance to record the three SDG choices of each team member and automatically total each SDG column to consider subsequently (see Step 4).

The team dialogue is facilitated by an individual who empowers the team to be respectful with inclusion, building common interests (which includes self-interests) with questions (Fig. 2) rather than resolving conflicts with answers. The facilitator serves as the broker of the dialogue by emphasising inquiry. With facilitation and questions, each team has the shared task to track their iterative progress from Step 3 (above) – across stages of informed decisionmaking (Fig. 2) on their journey to discover a single 'umbrella SDG' justified in view of their common interests. Optimally, there will be an opportunity for all team members together to reflect on lessons learned after playing the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME.

Applications of the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME

The COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME began with the diplomatic corps of Armenia in Fall 2018 at the invitation of Amb. Vahe Gabrielyan for Prof. Paul Arthur Berkman to train "Science Diplomacy" through the Diplomatic School of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia. During this period, Prof. Berkman also applied the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME in the video-conferencing course on *"Science Diplomacy: Environmental Security in the Arctic Ocean"*, which was offered jointly in the United States and Russia with The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University), respectively.[5] Additionally, the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME has been played repeatedly by 7th-grade students in the classes of Ms Kathryn Berkman at the Munich International School in Germany.

Since 2019, the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME has been applied among diverse diplomatic communities, in light of science diplomacy and informed decisionmaking initiatives with UNITAR, enabled by Mr Rabih El-Haddad, Director of the Division of Multilateral Diplomacy. These communities include: (1) the diplomatic corps of five nations through their Ministries of Foreign Affairs; and (2) students, diplomats and other professionals in eight week-long sessions online with the UNITED NATIONS DIPLOMACY 4.0 TRAINING

PROGRAMME (Fig. 3). Diplomatic corps training with science diplomacy and informed decisionmaking (Fig. 2) is illustrated by the week-long virtual session in October 2021, invited by Amb. Carmen Isabel Claramunt Garro with the Academia Diplomática Manuel Maria de Peralta in Costa Rica.

Among the diverse sessions with the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME, the teams with the Diplomatic School of Armenia from 2019-2022 are most comparable for cultural, gender, age and professional demographics (Table 1). The 3-day "Science Diplomacy" sessions with the Diplomatic School of Armenia were in Yerevan in 2019-2020 and virtual afterward virtual during the pandemic.

Table 1. Selection Totals among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME (Fig. 3) in "Science Diplomacy" Courses at the Diplomatic School of Armenia

TRAINING SESSION		SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL (SDG)																
Students	Date	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
12	APR '22	0	1	3	**8**	2	0	1	3	0	0	1	2	4	2	1	**6**	2
10	DEC '21	0	2	3	**6**	1	1	1	1	2	0	2	0	3	0	2	6	0
11	MAR '21	4	0	2	7	1	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	5	0	0	5	**3**
10	NOV '20	0	1	**3**	8	2	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	**8**	3
15	OCT '19	2	2	4	**9**	3	1	1	2	1	2	0	0	4	1	2	9	1
20	FEB '19	5	3	7	7	0	3	0	8	1	1	0	1	**7**	2	1	9	4
AVERAGE		1.8	1.5	3.7	**7.5**	1.5	1.5	0.7	3.0	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.5	3.8	0.8	1.0	**7.2**	2.1
Session Consensus Most Frequent *Umbrella SDG*																		

Table 1 reveals several commonalities among the above applications of the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME (FIGS. 1-3).

- Identification of a single *"umbrella SDG"* justified by the team may be a bridge too far, noting that consensus on a single SDG happened in 4 of the 6 sessions above (Table 1). In the other two sessions, the teams decided to have two umbrella SDGs, changing the rules of the game with common interest.
- Inevitably, in every application of the COMMON-INTEREST BUILDING – TRAINING GAME, the team dialogues started with a selection of the most popular SDGs. But what about the minority SDGs? To be inclusive – how do we effectively address who, what, when, where, why and how with sustainable development at local-to-global levels, short-to-long term in our climate-challenged civilisation of the 21st century? It is noteworthy, in two sessions (Table 1), the teams revealed their common interests with an "umbrella SDG" they initially considered to be of minor importance.
- Across the six sessions with the Diplomatic School of Armenia, QUALITY EDUCATION (SDG 4) was highly ranked and recognised as the *"umbrella SDG"* in half of the sessions (Table 1).
- PEACE AND JUSTICE STRONG INSTITUTIONS (SDG 16) also was highly ranked in all sessions and recognised twice as the *"umbrella SDG"*.
- Other *"umbrella SDG"* justified by the teams with their common interests included: GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING (SDG 3), CLIMATE ACTION (SDG 13) and PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS (SDG 17), which also were represented among the outcomes across the UNITAR sessions.

What will your team decide about common interests with the SDGs?

Lessons Learned with the Common-Interest Building – Training Game

The common-interest building – training game is itself inclusive in view of lifelong learning. Imagine 17 blocks simply coloured as the SDGs with symbols, but without words, offering a group of children the choice of any three blocks before they can read, playing the game with Steps 1-4. With words comes increasing complexity, but the elements of inclusion remain unchanged across our lifetimes as we learn to frame and address questions, which build common interests (Fig. 2).

The 17 SDGs are rich with complexity that can be tailored as a 'pedagogical playground' across lifetime stages of learning: K-12 (education), universities (research) and professions (leadership). More steps with the common-interest building – training game can be added, based on the educational objectives and facilitator creativity. The opportunity is a matter of exploration for each team member and teams together, asking questions that can be addressed given the 169 targets and 231 unique indicators aligned with the 17 SDGs,[6] which can be treated as data points with methods across stages of research (Fig. 2).

More broadly, the depth and breadth to explore the SDGs are amplified across all countries on Earth, noting that 187 of 195 nations have contributed at least one Voluntary National Review (VNR) of their progress with the SDGs since 2015.[7] The context of the SDGs can also be explored across the arena of global institutions that operate short-to-long term,[8] as exemplified by the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*[9] with its ongoing annual Conferences of the Parties (COP). Moreover, there are many analyses that consider interests in the SDGs from diverse perspectives, addressing primary questions, such as equitability.10 Inclusion (who, what, when, where, why and how) with the SDGs is revealed by their very existence, evolving from our common future.[11]

Inspiration with the SDGs (Fig. 1) exists across the Earth for next-generation leaders to become champions for humanity. Across the spectrum of subnational-national-international jurisdictions, the gift of the SDGs is with a common-interest building to transform our globally-interconnected civilisation with informed decisionmaking skills (Fig. 2) that can be shared equitably among all 8 billion of us with lifelong learning, creating synergies with education, research and leadership. This is the hope and imagination with the common-interest building – training game…*"for the benefit of all on Earth across generations".*

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