

Global Perspectives on Knowledge Co-production: Transformative Insights from the MGG Academy

Embark on a journey of collaboration and innovation as Nitish Barole, Jiayinaer Bolati and Reon Van der Merwe – three dynamic professionals from India, China and South Africa – share their transformative experiences from the 2023 [Managing Global Governance \(MGG\) Academy](#) at the [German Institute of Development and Sustainability \(IDOS\)](#) in Bonn. Discover how this [immersive program](#) reshaped their perspectives on international cooperation, youth engagement, and sustainable development. Through their Change Maker Project, which was implemented between 6 and 24 November 2023, they navigated the intricate terrain of academia-civil society partnerships at the [University of Applied Science Bonn-Rhein-Sieg](#), unraveling the secrets to fostering impactful collaborations. Join them as they delve into the tapestry of global challenges, unveiling actionable insights and strategies for building a brighter, more inclusive future.

Please introduce yourself:

Nitish: I am Nitish, a humanitarian professional from India, with over a decade of experience in peacebuilding and youth engagement. I founded [Youth for Resilience](#) and co-founded Impacting Youth, both dedicated to meaningful youth engagement and program design.

Jiayinaer: I am Jiayinaer, one of the three [participants](#) from China in the MGG Academy 2023. I am working on environmental science, international cooperation and sustainable development. I was on the same Change Maker Project team with

Nitish and Reon, working on the “Knowledge co-production between research and international non-governmental organization (NGOs)” challenge.

Reon: I am Reon from South Africa, with ten years in youth development, specializing in multilateral organizations like BRICS, the United Nations, and the African Union. I focus on stakeholder engagement and creating spaces for youth to learn about international relations. I co-founded [Impacting Youth](#), aiming to enhance youth-related initiatives through social impact consultancy.

What did the MGG Academy at IDOS mean for you and how did it impact you personally and professionally?

Jiayinaer: The [MGG Academy](#) is not just a learning experience, it is an adventure of a lifetime, doing the right thing with the right people at the right time. Through the Academy, I engaged with a diverse group of individuals who share a common goal of contributing to global sustainability.

Reon: The MGG Academy was a unique professional experience, offering a three-month period to step back and reflect on my career path. It provided insights into Europe’s approach to development, broadening my horizons and helping me understand global perspectives. Personally, it instilled resilience and equipped me with the skills needed to navigate the complex challenges of the development sector. Interacting with [professionals from diverse backgrounds](#) enriched my understanding of collaboration and the importance of inclusivity and diversity in our work. Overall, the Academy reshaped my perspective on Africa’s role in the global development discourse, emphasizing the need for African practitioners to contribute uniquely to global challenges.

Nitish: The MGG Academy was invaluable both personally and professionally. It offered opportunities to learn new skills, engage with professionals from various countries, and gain a

deeper understanding of diverse topics. Personally, it promoted an appreciation for diversity, improving my outlook on teamwork and inclusion. Professionally, it emphasized the importance of collaboration on a global scale and provided insights into navigating multicultural environments. The [MGG Academy](#) was instrumental in shaping my growth within the development sector.

What was your Change Maker Project about and what are the most valuable insights from the action component of the Academy?

Nitish: We worked on identifying solutions for the [International Centre for Sustainable Development \(IZNE\)](#) at the University of Applied Science Bonn-Rhein-Sieg in order to address the challenge of building partnerships between research entities and international NGOs. They sought to integrate academia and industry to produce comprehensive knowledge. Our Change Maker Project addressed the struggle to form partnerships between these sectors. Through collaborative teamwork, we proposed ways to bridge the gap. This experience provided valuable insights into the complexities of research and academia, highlighting the importance of building trust and confidence in partnerships. Working in a diverse team during the Academy allowed us to exchange ideas and engage in high-level discussions. Despite the challenges, the project emphasized the need for patience and persistence in ensuring successful collaborations between research institutes and NGOs.

Jiayinaer: A wealth of information is available, but a lack of effective translation from academic language to practical, easily digestible formats for NGOs. The need for concise, easy-to-understand knowledge translation from academia to NGOs emerged as a crucial aspect of bridging the gap between research and practice. We saw a notable barrier between academia and NGOs, with each operating in separate spheres or even silos and having limited understanding of each other's perspectives and needs. Creating spaces for interaction,

dialogue, and networking between them was identified as essential for the [joint co-production of knowledge by practitioners and researchers](#).

Reon: The Academy provided a valuable experience in using the Design Thinking process, which we now integrate into our work on youth engagement. Our project highlighted the challenges in aligning the priorities of academia and NGOs and understanding their mixed expectations. It offered insights into the dynamics of these relationships and their implications for future engagement. Additionally, we explored the potential of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance collaboration in the development sector. Overall, the project underscored the importance of understanding and navigating the complexities of interdisciplinary partnerships for effective knowledge production and action.

How can the co-production of evidence-based and actionable knowledge between academia and international NGOs be strengthened?

Reon: Strengthening the co-production of evidence-based knowledge between academia and NGOs requires a shift from the traditional one-way dissemination model to a collaborative, iterative process. Firstly, acknowledging the expertise of NGOs and involving them in research agenda-setting is crucial. Whole process collaboration, where NGOs are engaged from project conceptualization to implementation, ensures the relevance and usability of research findings. Effective science communication is also essential to make academic research understandable and actionable for NGOs. Facilitating networking opportunities between academia and NGOs allows for organic collaboration. Personal relationships play a vital role in initiating and maintaining partnerships. Moreover, institutional mechanisms like NGO advisory boards can institutionalize engagement and ensure ongoing communication. Overall, creating a culture of collaboration, involving NGOs from the outset, enhancing science communication, facilitating

networking, and institutionalizing engagement are key strategies to strengthen the co-production of knowledge between academia and NGOs.

Jiayinaer: Enhancing the collaboration between academia and international NGOs to co-produce evidence-based and actionable knowledge requires promoting effective communication alongside encouraging interaction and mutual understanding. Clear and concise communication is essential to convey academic insights in accessible formats, facilitating broader comprehension and engagement. Establishing enduring partnerships based on mutual respect and shared goals is fundamental, and it involves creating platforms for ongoing dialogue, collaborative research, and knowledge-sharing forums. Promoting interdisciplinary approaches and facilitating capacity-building initiatives can further strengthen collaboration effectiveness. By harnessing the expertise of academia and NGOs and by embracing diverse perspectives, stakeholders can collectively generate impactful solutions to address complex global challenges.

What does the MGG Network mean to you?

Jiayinaer: The [MGG Network](#) serves as a platform where I am inspired, supported, and empowered to take action. It stimulates lifelong connections and collaborations, creating a sense of belonging and shared purpose among its members. Overall, the MGG Network is more than just a professional association, it is a community of changemakers striving to make a positive impact on the world.

Nitish: The [MGG Network](#) provides a valuable platform for collaboration and networking among professionals from diverse backgrounds and organizations. It enables individuals to learn from each other and work together on common goals. Through the Network, we can leverage each other's expertise and resources to address complex challenges effectively. Impacting Youth, our initiative born out of our experience at MGG, aims to

enhance youth engagement effectiveness. We recognized a growing need among organizations, including government agencies and corporations, to improve their youth initiatives. By providing tailored social impact consultancy services, we assist organizations in designing impactful programs for young people. Our focus is on empowering stakeholders, including NGOs, government agencies, and corporations to better engage with youth and create meaningful networks and opportunities for them. Drawing on our extensive experience and the Design Thinking process, we guide organizations in developing strategies and structures that ensure their youth initiatives achieve their intended outcomes. Through [Impacting Youth](#), we strive to make a meaningful contribution to youth development initiatives worldwide, tapping into the valuable professional and motivational resources of the MGG Network.

How do you see the role of youth in international cooperation for sustainable development?

Reon: Youth engagement in international cooperation for sustainable development requires a shift from tokenistic participation to meaningful inclusion and ownership. Platforms like regional youth parliaments offer institutionalized spaces where young people can consistently voice their perspectives and contribute to decision-making processes. However, organizations need to move beyond ad hoc engagement and adopt a bottom-up approach that empowers youth as stakeholders rather than just beneficiaries. Moreover, effective communication and understanding youth's needs and aspirations are crucial for meaningful involvement. As future leaders, young people bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and a sense of urgency to global challenges. By seeing them as partners in sustainable development efforts, we can harness their potential to drive positive change.

Jiayinaer: Youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow, they are the driving force behind international cooperation for sustainable development today. Their energy, creativity, and

passion make them invaluable contributors to global efforts towards a more sustainable future. As catalysts for change, youth bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to address pressing global challenges. Their active engagement and creative strategies are instrumental in driving effective actions and raising awareness on a global scale. Empowering youth in international cooperation initiatives generates momentum for positive change across borders.

Nitish: There is a need for a paradigm shift towards genuine inclusion and empowerment, where young people are not just consulted but actively involved in decision-making processes. Our approach at [Impacting Youth](#) emphasizes co-designing and co-implementing programs with young people, ensuring their ownership and leadership. It is essential to incorporate youth perspectives and priorities into policy documents and initiatives from the start. This requires continuous monitoring and evaluation to track the impact of youth consultations and ensure their voices are heard and acted upon. By recognizing their agency in shaping the future, we can leverage their creativity, energy, and passion to achieve the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#).

What other projects are you currently involved with? Can you tell us a few words about the Youth for Resilience organization in India and the YALI Regional Leadership Center Southern Africa?

Nitish: I am the founder of [Youth for Resilience](#), a global youth-led organization focusing on disaster risk reduction, climate change, and sustainable development. We empower young people through capacity-building and advocate for their meaningful engagement in decision-making processes. Additionally, I consult part-time with [World Wide Fund \(WWF\)](#) USA, designing and implementing programs for youth in Asia, Africa, and South America.

Reon: Alongside my work with Impacting Youth, I am a

facilitator and learning designer, collaborating with various organizations to develop courses on personal and professional development. Currently, I am involved with the [Young African Leaders Initiative](#) as a facilitator, guiding young leaders through leadership development content. I also contribute to the [Southern African Youth Forum](#), assisting in organizing flagship programs like the [SADC Youth Parliament and Youth Forum](#), promoting regional integration and Pan-Africanism among youth in the [South African Development Community \(SADC\)](#) region.

What would be areas where China, India, Romania and South Africa could cooperate more to address the Sustainable Development Goals? What opportunities and challenges do you see for South-South and Triangular cooperation?

Jiayinaer: In addressing the [SDGs](#), collaboration among these countries can strategically focus on key areas such as climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, renewable energy development, and sustainable urbanization. By leveraging their respective strengths and resources, they can drive significant progress towards achieving shared development objectives. Challenges such as resource disparities and differing development priorities can be navigated through innovative approaches and strategic partnerships. South-South and Triangular cooperation provide promising avenues for mutual learning, capacity-building, and knowledge exchange. Strengthening partnerships through platforms like the [United Nations Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#) and the [United Nations Industrial Development Organization \(UNIDO\)](#) facilitates knowledge exchange and accelerates progress towards SDG attainment.

Nitish: China, India, Romania, and South Africa have opportunities for collaboration in addressing climate change, especially considering its significant impact globally. Sharing experiences, best practices, and lessons learned in dealing with climate change-related challenges, such as

heatwaves, could be beneficial. Triangular cooperation, including South-South learning, presents opportunities for mutual growth and development, particularly at the youth level. However, challenges may include coordinating efforts among diverse stakeholders and ensuring equitable participation and benefit-sharing among participating countries. Nevertheless, leveraging triangular cooperation in areas like climate change could significantly contribute to achieving [SDG 17](#) on partnerships for the goals.

Reon: A shift in global dynamics is evident, marked by multiple crises alongside the rise of diverse centers of influence. Historically, the United States and Europe dictated global cooperation, but recent developments, like the formation of BRICS, highlight the need for a more inclusive approach. Understanding the unique historical struggles of nations like China, India, Romania, and South Africa is crucial for effective cooperation. Initiatives such as the [European Green Deal](#) risk appearing paternalistic and almost colonial to some partners from the Global South, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and co-creative approach to cooperation. Challenges for cooperation include avoiding polarization and Cold War mentalities, particularly for countries like Romania straddling both sides of the global divide. The focus should be on building partnerships based on mutual respect, understanding, and shared goals, rather than perpetuating outdated dichotomies.



















This interview has been taken by Lutz Drieling for the [Romanian International Development Review](#), which is published by the [Romanian Association for International Cooperation and Development \(ARCADIA\)](#). Lutz is originally from the state of Rhineland-Palatinate in Germany and currently a Research Fellow at the [Făgăraș Research Institute](#) in Southern Transylvania, Romania. Before completing his [MA in International Public Affairs at the University of Bucharest](#) last year, he obtained a [BA in Sustainable Social Policy from the Bonn-Rhine-Sieg University of Applied Sciences](#). The [International Centre for Sustainable Development](#) at Bonn-Rhine-Sieg University proposed the challenge for which Jiayinaer, Nitish and Reon developed the innovative solution in their Change Maker Project at IDOS. This interview was facilitated and coordinated by Roland Müller, Board Member at ARCADIA and also a participant in the 2023 MGG Academy.

The views presented in this article belong to their authors and are not reflecting the official position of ARCADIA and the Făgăraș Research Institute. The images in the photo

gallery have been provided by the participants.

Change Makers and Future Leaders: How a training and dialogue programme is making a difference for and beyond 2030

An interview with Roland Müller

An interview with Roland Müller

Date: February 19th, 2024

Interviewer: Doina Bulearcă

Roland Müller is a Board Member of the Romanian Association for International Cooperation and Development (ARCADIA). Last year, he was a [Managing Global Governance](#) (MGG) Academy fellow at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) in Bonn, Germany. This makes him and ARCADIA an integral part of the MGG Network today.

What is the MGG Academy all about, and how was your fellowship experience?

The main objective of the [MGG Academy](#) is to support and prepare future change-makers for a life dedicated to sustainable development. It is a highly competitive training and policy dialogue format that brings together outstanding professionals and leaders from government institutions, think

tanks, academia, civil society, and the private sector in several emerging countries – Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa – and the European Union (EU).

The Academy has three components: knowledge, leadership, and action. Between mid-August and the beginning of December 2023, we were based in Bonn, but we also went to several leadership retreats in idyllic locations of North Rhine-Westphalia, as well as on study trips to Berlin and Brussels. In Berlin, within the International Futures seminar, organized in cooperation with the German Federal Foreign Office, we undertook a full academic module centered on sustainable digitalization and negotiation training, all while being immersed in a diplomatic setting. The leadership retreats were a great opportunity to engage in team-building exercises and to develop soft skills.

In the current context of polycrisis and geopolitical tensions, the Academy represents an oasis for addressing global challenges by building trust, learning from diverse perspectives, and co-creating solutions. On a personal level, the exchange between the participants from eight countries and five continents made me more aware of the value of trust in international cooperation. The programme might have been structured around competence development, leadership, project management, and networking, but, in my opinion, what really lay at its heart was a concerted facilitation for establishing trustful relationships. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, starting last summer and well into the fall, friendships for a lifetime have been forged.

The Academy is organized and hosted by IDOS, one of the world's leading research institutions and think tanks for global sustainable development, and funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany's full-fledged ministry dedicated to development cooperation. For three and a half months, it provided me and 20 other early to mid-career experts with the opportunity to

exchange on global challenges, co-create knowledge, share learnings, and cooperate in diverse teams while growing further as leaders for sustainable development. I am grateful that I was one of the two EU professionals entrusted to feature in this innovative setting, although I did submit my feedback that Europe should be better represented in this format.

Beyond profound knowledge and leadership qualities, transformative change requires inclusive visionary action. In this regard, I particularly enjoyed how the course blended academic and leadership modules with applied project work. The Change Maker Project was somehow the crown jewel of the Academy because it welded almost everything we had learned before in the final stage of the programme. Focusing on the opportunities and challenges of global cooperation and transformation to sustainability in times of disruptive crisis was a privilege that obliged.

Of course, we also brought our own set of strengths and skills to the table, which benefited everyone. Knowledge cooperation and policy dialogue are two core areas of expertise in my professional profile that contribute greatly to implementing the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I am happy that our challenge giver brought them up. To conclude, for me, the MGG experience was unique and wonderful because it occurred on a platform where sustainability meets development cooperation. Most of my research interests are to be found precisely at this intersection. IDOS certainly supports in numerous ways future change makers who are dedicated to the path of global cooperation and transformation to sustainability.

What else can you tell us about the Change Maker Project (CMP)?

The Academy and, specifically, the CMP enabled the participants to collaborate in small teams to develop and

implement real-life sustainability solutions to real-life problems presented to us by different actors, from development agencies to UN entities, from academia to the private sector. Reflecting together and individually on the challenges of international cooperation and the needs of various stakeholders was the starting point of the project component. As we explored a concrete topic through the sensing journey and moved towards the sounding board – the presentation of the hands-on solutions – I became aware of how working in highly diverse teams played out. In the process, we applied the design thinking method for innovative problem solving, a method I knew little about before and which was a major take from the CMP. However, the action component of the Academy was as much about design thinking, project development, and project management as it was about a specific policy area or the experience of working together in a team.

The organizer of the MGG Academy itself brought the challenge my team worked on. The Decolonize working group at IDOS was interested in how they could further contribute to building fair and equal research partnerships, especially with partners from the Global South. I shared a strong interest in this topic because of the importance knowledge cooperation has for inclusive development. With three other colleagues from South Africa, Mexico, and Indonesia (Danai Tembo, Bruno Berthier, and Anta Nasution), I conducted several interviews with IDOS researchers, senior management, and a few external stakeholders to better understand the issue at hand. After reflecting on and reframing the problem tree, we proceeded to shape our sounding board with a list of opportunity areas that IDOS could consider in its research strategy and practice. We opted for an artistic intervention method to create an impactful message for our “recommendations” on more equitable and just research partnerships. After selecting a set of late 19th and early 20th century paintings depicting colonial scenes, we intervened on them so that the new artwork highlighted our proposed opportunity areas. I take great pride in how well our

sounding board presentation was received.

Overall, the CMP was a great opportunity to bond as a team, exchange (sometimes conflicting) understandings, explore new methods and tools, and engage with a highly relevant theme. It has prepared me to further explore and apply postcolonial theories and perspectives on development in my activity.

When and where does the MGG Network come into action?

The Network became relevant in December when the course came to an end. Once you graduate from the MGG Academy, you and your institution will automatically become part of the MGG alumni network. It brings together alumni from all the previous generations – the 17th batch will graduate this year. This gives us access to a wide variety of academic and professional profiles. One of the purposes of the network is to continue to provide a space for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and networking. One's initiative is key in this network, which also has an online platform. Members are encouraged to launch calls for partnerships and propose collaboration ideas, come together in research projects or organize online and offline events. The class of 2023 had a unique chance to get an early glimpse of what this means when the Global Network Conference took place in Bonn at the end of September. We also had the opportunity to interact, maybe not as much as I had wished, with the participants in the IDOS 59th Postgraduate Course. This flagship programme was established in 1965 and enhanced the competence of master's graduates aspiring to a career in international cooperation for development and sustainability.

The MGG alumni contribute an international network and a global perspective. We have developed our leadership competencies and possess a profound ability to address global governance issues in our institutions' work. I hope that ARCADIA will benefit from this membership as I will further seek to strengthen its organizational capacity, search for new

opportunities and forms of cooperation, respond to innovative ideas and concepts, and expand our partnerships in this vibrant global network. The specificity of the Network is that it provides a gateway to the so-called Global South, its views, needs, and concerns. It, therefore, provides a legitimate platform for action geared towards implementing the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The EU and the world need more of these platforms where diverse individual and institutional actors who embrace the values of the UN Charter can convene.

Who is eligible for this programme, and how can they apply?

The project is addressed to highly qualified *young* professionals working in a partner institution from the MGG Network or an institution interested in future participation. To apply, one must be a national or a permanent resident of one of the MGG partner countries – Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa – or the European Union. One should be around 25-40 years of age. The candidates should work or be concerned professionally with issues relevant to sustainable development. A minimum of three years of work experience (internships are also considered) is expected, and at least a master's degree is deemed preferable. The application form can be found here: <https://www.idos-research.de/en/training/managing-global-governance/mgg-application/>.

Can the fellows work while attending the Academy?

The program is dedicated to people who are employed and professionally engaged. Applying for this program also requires the written support and consent of the employer. While maintaining employment status, one should take a break from the work tasks back home and intensely engage with the Academy programme. It is a full-time format, which is demanding but quite intellectually stimulating. It normally consists of (five) workdays that start at 9:30 AM and finish

around 5 PM, with an hour and a half for lunch break. Sometimes, it can get intense, and you must calibrate your effort to avoid energy draining. The study trips and their rapid succession with academic modules and leadership sessions can be exhausting. The Change Makers Project also completely shifts the dynamic of the Academy from the rather passive end of attending and receiving to a space where one has to be active, independent yet collaborative, and responsible for one's own schedule. If you do not calibrate your efforts well, you can get overwhelmed toward the end of the programme. The good news is that amazing coaches and tutors are available to assist at this stage and throughout the entire duration of the Academy.

What else do you think is important for potential candidates to know?

Each selected participant will receive free accommodation in a one-bedroom apartment in Bonn, and the travel expenses to Brussels and Berlin (but not from their home countries to Germany) will be covered. The programme funding also offers a monthly allowance of 800 EUR. The maximum number of participants is 22, with 2 to 4 fellows selected from each country. This year, the application deadline has been extended to March 10th.



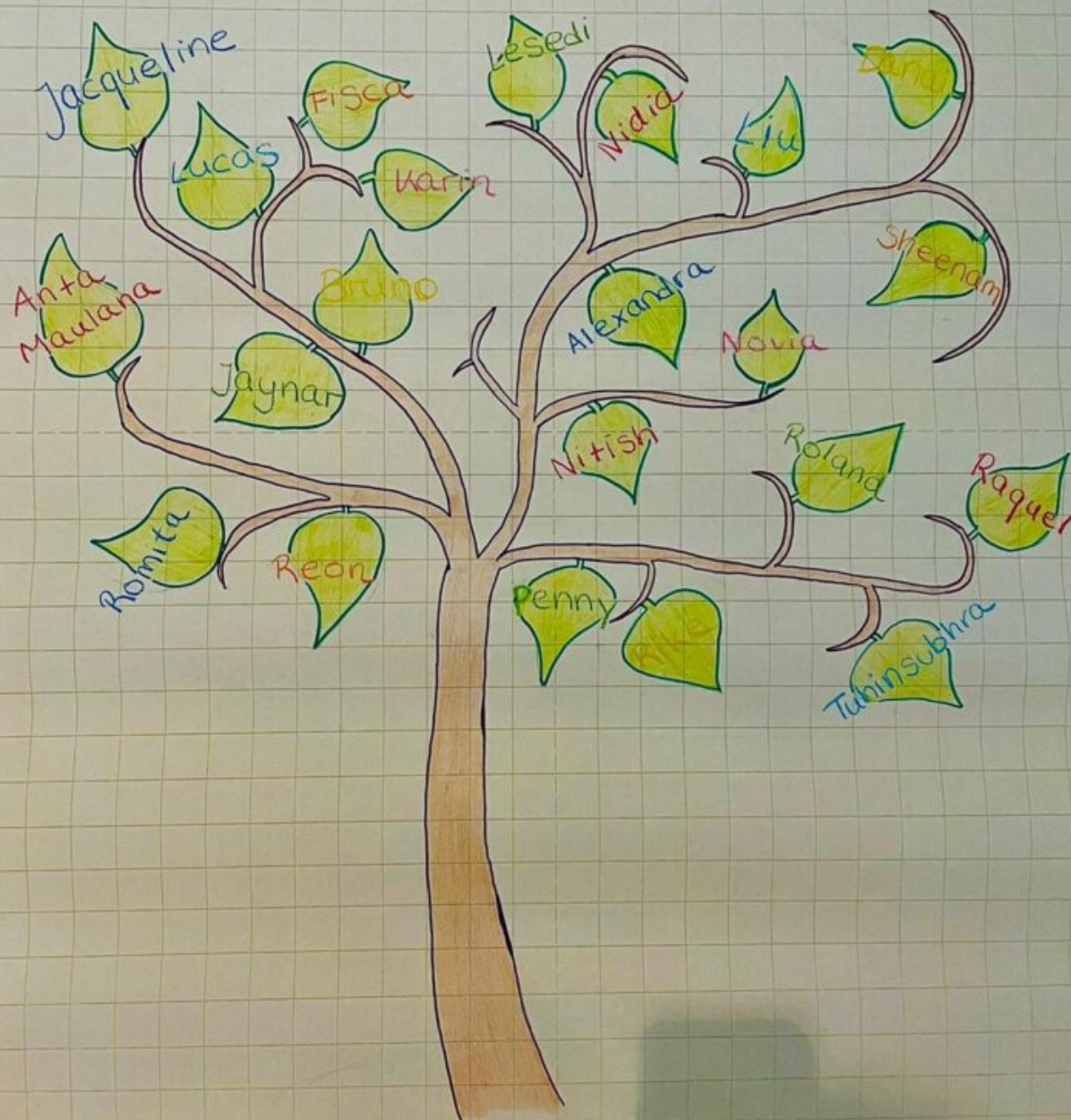






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The European Year for Development in Romania

2015 is the [European Year for Development](#) marking the EU's commitment in accelerating the progress towards the MDGs and stepping up its efforts between now and the SDGs target date of 2030. It was for the first time in its history when a European year was focusing on what is happening beyond EU's borders. Through 12 thematic months, the EC, namely DG DEVCO and other EU institutions tried to raise awareness on the global engagement of the EU with its neighboring countries and international partners.

A [special survey](#) dedicated to the #EYD has been carried out at the end of 2014 in all the 28 Member States of the European Union. At a European level, 85% of the citizens consider that helping people in developing countries is extremely important and should be a priority for the EU (64%).

However, more than half of the Europeans (55%) do not know where the EU aid for development goes and lack knowledge on the way the EU operates in partner countries where development work is conducted.

Having a look at the way Romanians answered, we discovered that 55% of the population does not know where the [Romanian ODA](#) goes; nevertheless, almost the same percent of respondents (54%) consider that tackling poverty in developing countries should be a priority for the national government. About 70% agree that tackling poverty in developing countries is a moral duty of the European Union.

In this context of confusion and morality, the European Year for Development should have brought some clarity and raised awareness about the EU development cooperation and foster a sense of shared-responsibility and global commitment.

In order to find out more about the #EYD2015 activities, challenges and priorities in Romania, we interviewed ***Ms Olga Anghel, Romanian ODA Project Assistant at UNDP.***

Alexandra: According to the abovementioned survey, there is a gap between acknowledging the moral idea of helping ‘the other’ and understanding national and European priorities in terms of development cooperation. Olga, how would you evaluate Romanians’ knowledge and understanding of the idea behind the European Year for Development?

Olga: In Romania, as well as in other European countries, the knowledge and understanding of the idea behind EYD2015 highly depends of the way international development cooperation topics are presented. Prior to developing the national work

plan for the EYD2015, UNDP and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania had various consultations not only with actors actively involved in international development and cooperation but also with "new comers" to development scene in order to better assess how international development topics be communicated in order to reach beyond the "usual suspects". Following these discussions, it resulted that EYD2015 should be communicated in Romania using human stories for people to make sense of national and EU policies on development cooperation, the MDGs or the newly adopted SDGs. Romania is no exception to the way development cooperation is perceived by the general public in Europe as the above mentioned survey reveals. As we are rapidly approaching the end of EYD2015, a European year which had as backbone communicating on international development and cooperation topics with a human twist, I believe that some light was shed between the moral aspect of helping "the others" and national and European priorities in terms of development cooperation. Therefore, the good aspects of EYD2015 and the best practices implemented under its umbrella should be incorporated into further communications efforts when it comes to international development and cooperation in order to continue improving the knowledge of European citizens on the aid awarded by the European Union and its member states to developing countries.

Alexandra: How was the European Year for Development celebrated in Romania? (i.e. activities, actions, discussions, etc.)

Olga: The national work plan for EYD2015 in Romania comprised **five work packages** divided by the type of activities and events planned.

The first work package comprised a social media campaign with three International Solidarity Ambassadors designated to present and explain to their targeted audiences international development and cooperation topics. The specific objective of the Ambassadors for Development campaign is to encourage

public figures to initiate, undertake or support activities and special events dedicated to EYD2015 with aim of raising public awareness about and galvanize support around development and international cooperation efforts.

The second work package comprises **co-organizing side-events mainly during cultural events chosen** especially because of their unique power to attract, mobilise and inspire large audiences. International development-focused **side events** such as exhibitions, debates, talks, were organized during film festivals, concerts and sports activities. Also, **an art exhibition was planned part of this work package**. Romanian young artists were involved in promoting EYD2015 by creating illustrations and drawings portraying international development messages, MDGs / SDGs, etc. Their art pieces were further displayed in an art exhibition.

As part of the third work package, a collection of Romanian official development assistance **Success Stories blogs** will be created and posted/disseminated on line to inform/increase awareness of Romania's development cooperation results so far. Also, **special prize for international development projects** was awarded within the Romanian Civil Society Gala.

A number of flagship events are currently under implementation as part of the forth work package. A series of **career orientation talks** will be organized in Romanian universities, featuring a variety of international development practitioners from civil society, international organizations, private sector and volunteerism who will share success stories and professional challenges on the ground. The events are dedicated to students interested in learning more about international development and career opportunities in the field. Also, EYD2015 **opening and closing conferences** were developed under this work package in order to gather the major development stakeholders (academia, policy decision makers, media, civil society and the large public) to inform them about Romania's and EU's development cooperation policies and

programs, to raise awareness on the benefits it brings to the Romanian and European citizens and to stimulate engagement in the global development debate and actions. A **public opinion survey** to test the level of Romanian citizens' awareness and information with regard to the EU and Romania's development cooperation policies is currently being conducted at the national level. The survey follows the opinion poll conducted by the MFA in 2009 and will aim at recording and analysing the trends in Romanians' awareness and information levels on these topics.

The fifth work package comprises a **call for project proposals** launched targeting Romanian NGO, students' associations and other youth organizations, media groups, schools and universities. Currently, 7 organizations are implementing communications projects on EYD2015 as a result of the call for proposals.

Alexandra: The EYD should have been a major opportunity for NGOs to engage in a dialogue with citizens about global priorities, social justice and new development challenges. How would you assess the engagement of Romanian NGOs in taking part and initiating activities related to the EYD?

Olga: NGOs played a key role in making EYD2015 a success in Romania, from the feedback given before the submission of the national work plan to the European Commission and the continuous assistance offered through the implementation of the EYD2015 activities to their vital role in the continuation of this years' "legacy". Over 80% of the activities implemented as part of EYD2015 in Romanian were implemented in partnership with local NGOs. We were very happy to create new synergies throughout this year with various NGOs, from youth to cultural organizations and their support was essential when it came to communicating development in innovative ways to students, young professionals, or artists for example. Apart from partnerships, civil society organizations the opportunity to put their EYD2015 ideas into practice via a call for

proposal especially dedicated to NGOs, academia and media associations. The projects selected brought creativity and diversity to international development communication, hence reaching multiple audiences across the entire country. Just to name a few key elements to the projects implemented by NGOs, academia and media associations: the development of a board game on migration and climate change to be played in schools, a graffiti on world solidarity, bursaries allocated to journalists to investigate the current hot topics on the international development agenda, articles on development published on key media platforms in Romania, trainings on SDGs in various cities in the country and peer to peer challenges addressed to teenagers, a photography exhibition at the metro. The number and diversity of these initiatives shows the high level of engagement of NGOs in implementing EYD2015 in Romania, a contribution that should be continued beyond this year.

Alexandra: Could you give us some examples of initiatives and projects designed under the EYD concept in Romania?

Olga:EYD2015 offered the incentive to change not only what was being communicated in terms of



At the border of the EU exhibition, Eurosfat 2015

international development but also how the information was disseminated. As development language switched to

storytelling, showcasing development results switched to hashtags, Facebook posts, twitter feeds and Instagram photos. In Romania, this European trend of reaching targets beyond the “usual suspects” by using social media was also adopted. One of the initiatives development under EYD2015 that aimed at bringing development topics closer to non-development practitioners was the designation of three International Solidarity Ambassadors- Andreea Raicu, Connect-R and Horațiu Țicău. Throughout the year, the three Ambassadors communicated to their audiences causes related to international development vis blog posts, events and projects targeting young people or through televised interventions. Over 14 side-events have been implemented during various festivals, conferences or related happenings targeting audiences seldom exposed to international development. For example, at the beginning of the year, international development topics, especially Africa and Ukraine related, were debated during One World Romania. Also, during World Press Photo Exhibition in Bucharest, people could express their support for the LGBT community by tying a ribbon at the “Be free of your prejudices” installation placed in the University Square. During EYD2015, “World’s Best News” newspaper -a collection of positive news on international development- was distributed in Romania as well as in other 19 European countries. Over 9.000 copies of the newspaper were



disseminated by young volunteers during the Bucharest Days celebration in September. Youth was a peculiar targeted audience for the EYD2015 initiatives as the hopes for a better world often are placed on the shoulders of the young

generation. At the Romanian Youth Council, international development practitioners discussed along with students coming from across the country about what does it mean to work towards ending extreme poverty. Art was also used in order to increase the level of awareness amongst young people. During

Bucharest Galleries Weekend, „The activist's guide on making the world a better place" exhibition was organized. The exhibition displays 10 young Romanian artists' visions on global issues such as: the rights of women and girls, peace and security, humanitarian aid, climate change, sustainable development, human rights, gender equality and world solidarity. As it is never too early to learn about solidarity with other nations, during ONG fest, children could learn more about Africa by drawing or participating in a quizz, or „treasure hunting" the MDGs in the Herăstrău Park. Last but not least, 7 successful projects which were previously mentioned resulted from the call for proposals targeting NGOs, academia and media associations launched in April as part of EYD2015.

Alexandra: According to the abovementioned survey, there is also a gap between the perceived moral duty to help others and citizens' availability to take action, with Romania having the 2nd lowest rate of citizen involvement (6%) in international development. In terms of communicating EYD to the Romanian public, how did you take this challenge into account? Do you think EYD will have improved on citizens' engagement?

Olga: Taking into account the fact that EYD2015 spans throughout a year only, a series of events showcasing possibilities of engaging in international development activities were planned especially targeting young people in order to address the challenge posed by the low level of Romanian citizens' involvement in international development. For example, a series of "career orientation talks" entitled "Leave your mark" was planned to take place in Cluj, Iași, Timișoara and Bucharest. "Leave your mark" is a series of lectures addressed to students who are interested in learning more about international development and the career opportunities in this field. The event brings together development practitioners working in Romania and abroad who would share their success stories and professional challenges

on the ground. The guest speakers usually have various international development backgrounds, coming from public institutions, civil society, private sector and/or volunteerism. The aim of the talks is to inform students about what it means choosing a career in international development and how to become a volunteer or a development practitioner.

It is difficult to assess a long term impact such as improving the level of engagement of citizens in international development related activities as EYD2015 spans over a year only. Within the EYD2015 framework, at least two first very important steps towards reaching further goals have been improved, the level of understanding on what does international development mean and what are the possibilities for actively engaging in eradicating poverty.

Alexandra: Now when 2015 is about to end, what is the legacy of the European Year for Development in Europe and in Romania?

Olga: EYD2015 brought international development and cooperation topics towards the attention of the general public in Romania as well as at European level. It was an opportunity to discuss what are the key themes that we need to debate at the moment or to look further to, it was a way of looking back on what we achieved and where we still need to work. At European level, EYD2015 will remain the first year when the European Union communicated at a large scale on its external actions and the umbrella, the common goal, to create synergies and partnerships amongst diverse parties interested in international development. EYD2015 brought at European level the opportunity to implement common communications activities on international development topics amongst member states such as the "Worlds Best News" initiative, taking place in multiple EU countries. In Romania, EYD2015 was one of the first substantive efforts to communicate on international development topics especially for the general Romanian public. Under EYD2015 in Romania, a number of initiatives were piloted that are worth continuing beyond the end of this year and a

number of good practices to be taken into account when communicating on international development further. Amongst these, I would like to mention three. Firstly, whenever communicating international development topics to audiences that are not familiar with the development language it must always be kept in mind the fact that international development is about people, it is about human stories. Secondly, communicating on international development should not be a "one man show,,. Partnerships are essential in order to reach different audiences and to enhance the creativity of the developed initiatives. Throughout EYD2015, new partners joined the international development discussions and this brought a fresh perspective to the way events and projects were developed, implemented and communicated. Thirdly, actively engaging young people in initiatives undertaken under EYD2015 brought a fresh perspective to the actions implemented.

EYD2015 offered the space to implement "out of the box" communications initiatives, to bring new actors to the international development table, to reach out beyond the „usual suspects" audiences and it is essential to continue the partnerships development and the constant dialogue between interested parties for the EYD2015 legacy to live beyond December 2015.

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Ms Olguta Anghel is the Romanian ODA Project Assistant communicating on the [European Year for Development 2015](#) at the [United Nations Development Programme – Istanbul Regional Hub](#). Previously, she worked in Tiraspol, Chisinau and Sarajevo on conflict resolution and communications projects in the academic and non-governmental sectors. She holds a Master's Degree in Peace in Conflict Studies from the University of St Andrews, Scotland, a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations and International Law. In addition to this, she has a keen interest in the way Social Media can be used to inspire, empower and unite communities in order to bring

positive changes in the world we live in.

Talking the language of Human Rights activism in Romania

Amnesty International Bucharest Group, the first and only local group of Amnesty International in Romania, was founded in August 2014 gathering at the very beginning 10 members only. Since then, the group developed and it consists now of 30 members who undertook four campaigns in order to raise awareness about refugee and asylum-seekers' rights, sexual and reproductive rights, women's rights, freedom of expression, political and civic rights and the ban of torture practices.



Ionela Maria Ciolan is the initiator of the Volunteer Facilitators movement of Amnesty International in Romania and the founder and leader of the first Human Rights activists group of Amnesty in her country (**Amnesty International Bucharest Group**). She has extensive experience in youth work, advocacy and Human Rights (HR) and had organized 9 international campaigns in Romania concerning Roma/ LGBT /sexual and reproductive rights, women's rights, refugee and asylum-seekers' rights, housing rights, freedom of speech, etc.

Alexandra: Since 1961, Amnesty International has been involved

in major campaigns, investigations and communications in order to promote a world of Human Rights for all. It has more than 7 million activists, members, supporter and donors all around the world. *In Romania, you have been working as an Amnesty Volunteer Facilitator since 2011 and afterwards you created Amnesty International Bucharest Group. What were the incentives that led to the establishment of the AI local group in Romania?*

Ionela: After 3 years of intensive collaboration and 6 Human Rights campaigns with Amnesty as a Volunteer Facilitator, I have decided that I got enough experience and understanding of the way the organization works in order to move to the next level. Founding this group came from my desire to promote AI and its values in my country. I wish I could bring my contribution towards changing the Romanian mentality concerning Human Rights, namely making ordinary citizens more tolerant and open to embrace diversity. A large number of them do not know what Human Rights are and have never had any Human Rights education in school or throughout their life. Thus, the degree of intolerance and discrimination in Romania is, at some extent, worrisome.



Apart from my idealistic goal to improve Romanians' attitude in this direction, I have also been motivated by my willing to positively change Romania's image abroad. If my country is internationally perceived as one where various Human Rights (i.e. Roma/ women/ LGBT/ prisoners' rights, etc.) are persistently violated, I wanted to stand up against such practices and bring my contribution towards building another side of Romania, one, where we care about Human Right, respect them and fight to promote them, both locally and globally.

Alexandra: You have served as a Volunteer Facilitator at AI for almost four years now. *What are your responsibilities as a volunteer facilitator/group leader in Romania?*

Ionela: As a Volunteer Facilitator, I've been in charge with the organization of several Amnesty campaigns over here (i.e. finding out what are the most efficient ways to organize a campaign on a certain subject, preparing working strategy plans, recruiting volunteers, coordinating and training them, promoting the events through social media, maintaining a constant contact with my Regional Coordinator from the International Secretariat in London, preparing the logistics, facilitating the events, delivering Amnesty messages on all their specific campaigns, collecting petitions and letters of support and sending them to London, etc.).

As a group leader, I would mention that I am in charge with the internal communication of Amnesty International Bucharest Group, the coordination of my team of activists, namely motivating and offering them support, intermediating the communication between the group and our coordinator from the International Secretariat, etc. I also make sure that the message we present through our campaigns and other coordination tasks perfectly matches with the one promoted by Amnesty.

Alexandra: Since 2011, you and Amnesty International Bucharest Group have organized several campaigns that aimed to raise awareness for several causes such as Roma rights ("Stop forced evictions of Roma community in Romania"), the fight against torture ("Stop torture"), Women's rights ("My body, my rights"), etc. *Could you recall any moment or any lesson about freedom and dignity that had a tremendous impact on your activity as a volunteer for AI in Romania and motivated you to work harder in order to improve the Human Rights situation in Romania?*

Ionela: Last year, I was involved in the 3rd Human Rights

Action Camp of Amnesty in Bulgaria where we've discussed the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. At that time, the refugee crisis wasn't so widely covered by International media; however, this does not mean at that time asylum seekers' rights were not violated. Apart from AI activists from all over Europe, some refugees accepted to attend the camp with us. The stories they shared were simply heartbreaking. Very briefly, I will give you some examples and I wish readers could put themselves in the shoes of these people.

In 2011, when conflict erupted in Libya, Said, a 10-year old child was playing in a football competition in Libya. Against his will, Libyan authorities put him in an overcrowded boat and sent him to Italy. Apparently, this happened at Gaddafi's instructions when Italian forces joined the NATO air campaign against Libya. However, there can be no justification for sending away a helpless minor in a foreign country where, as you can imagine, he didn't know anyone and had zero-knowledge of Italian. Not even today, after 4 years, he couldn't reconnect with his family. He doesn't know if they are still alive or not, if they flew away from Libya or not.

Other refugees shared with us critical moments from their life back in their home countries where war is a daily fact. Escaping from war-torn Syria or Iraq was not an easy task at all, but a risky trip by boat towards unknown lands. All these personal recollections of the refugees' journey to Europe have touched me so deeply that I returned to Romania with the purpose of creating the AI group we have today. I wanted to fight harder in order to spread the AI Human Rights cases in Romania. If until this camp, I wasn't very convinced that I was ready to move from a single volunteer activity to leading a group of volunteers, that experience and the courage of the refugees I've met, gave me the reasons and the strength to be more determined in promoting human rights and less worried about *what if I'll fail*.

Alexandra: 2015 is definitely a watershed moment for all development workers involved in the fight for a better world for all. Human Rights are at the core of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are about to be adopted in 2015. From your point of view, as a Human Rights activist and a youth worker, how would you evaluate the new post-2015 agenda? If we define it as a new Human Rights agenda, how would you assess both its potential achievements and shortcomings?

Ionela: As we all know, the post-2015 Agenda comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets that are to be attained by 2030. Of course, it is an ambitious, wide-range global plan to create a better world for all. From a Human Rights activist point of view, the new SDGs tackle some of the most pressing issues of our time: ending extreme poverty and hunger, reduce gender inequality, increase access to health care and education, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, etc.; some of these *things* seem pretty basic and are taken for granted by many of us. One of the most relevant aspect of the new UN agenda is the fact that the SDGs do not focus anymore on developing countries only (like the MDGs used to do), but they strongly claim that even in the most advanced nations, there are people left aside, living at the edge of poverty, people who don't have access to minimum basic facilities. Therefore, the UN system aims to raise a challenging debate with the participation of each and every country to analyse their own level of achievement in regards to the proposed sustainable development goals.

While the new SDGs framework can make a lasting impact in the world as we know it and improve the current situation, there are many doubts about the results of the post-2015 Agenda. The main critique comes from the fact that some of the targets are vaguely expressed, generally presented and hard to measure and put into practice. Additionally, we have to keep in mind that some goals, although they sound really appealing, cannot

(easily) be achieved within the desired timeframe. We also have to ask ourselves if all the countries have the necessary resources (material, technological and the knowledge) to accomplish these objectives. And in this particular case, how would countries select their priority items? Is there any scale system to measure what goals are the most important or in other words, the first / second priorities in a country?

Alexandra: Keeping in mind the new post-2015 Agenda, what are the goals Romania should place more emphasis on in the next coming years?



Ionela: If we are looking at all the 17 SDGs is hard to select the areas where we have to be more engaged. However, keeping in mind the real concerns of Romanians, I believe that ending poverty (or at least, diminishing it), increasing

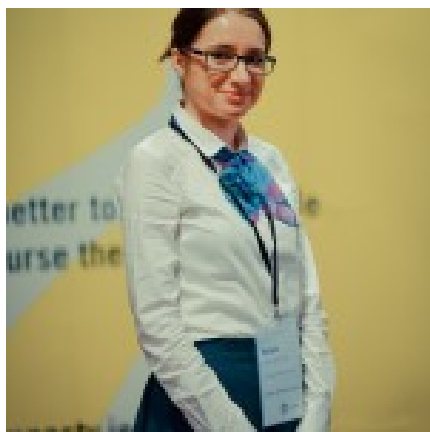
health care, investing in quality education and promoting sustainable, inclusive economic growth are the areas where we should invest more. Let me also add that *achieving greater equality and empower women and girls* should be one of our priorities and we need to keep on fighting the battle in order to reduce domestic violence, end human trafficking (affecting young girls and women in general), and ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. In this direction, I totally support the idea of having sexual and reproductive education programs in schools. At the moment, the rates of teen birth and abortion (under 19- year old girls) in Romania are one of the highest in Europe; moreover, 60% of sexual active teenagers (teenagers between 15-19- year old) have never used contraception. This can be a real problem not only in terms of birth or abortion numbers, but also concerning the spread of STDs. Needless to add, the economic impact on the state.

Alexandra: These days, many people are interested in humanitarian and development work. *What is the message you would like to pass on to those who are interested by the activities of the AI group in Romania?*

Ionela: I invite all those interested in the work of Amnesty International to visit [AI's website](#) and read about the ongoing campaigns and sign the petitions. By signing a petition, promoting it and encouraging friends to do the same, we are spreading the message of Amnesty and we are gathering support for that case. It's not a singular example where millions of individuals from different corners of the world supported and promoted the same case, thus helping Amnesty to have a stronger impact and succeed in freeing people, stopping governments from violating human rights and finally changing some people's lives. Because each of us can have the power to bring his/ her contribute to changing the world in a better place.

They can also join Amnesty by becoming online members. Needless to add, if they consider that they need to acquire more knowledge regarding human rights, they can join Amnesty's first massive open online course (MOOC) on freedom of expression, which is [now](#) open for registration.

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Ionela is the first Romanian in the history of Amnesty International who was selected as an International Movement Delegate for Europe to participate in the 2015 Amnesty's International Council Meeting. This is the highest position that an activist can have in the organization and Ionela has represented all volunteers and local groups from the

European countries where Amnesty doesn't have an office.

Recently, she extended her experience with a Professional Fellowship granted by the U.S. Department of State and an internship at [Chicago Coalition for the Homeless](#).

A PhD Candidate in International Relations, her research is focused on the European Neighbourhood Policy, the EU's Eastern Partnership and the Union's relations with Russia.

What in a word: Education for Sustainable Development



Over the past few months, under Adela's coordination, the **Education for Sustainable Development Group** has been working at creating a network of Multipliers on Sustainable Development information, in the framework of [2015 – European](#)

[Year for Development](#). This endeavour was developed as part of the ***Multiplied information, greater impact*** project implemented by [ARCADIA](#) with the support of the [UNDP's regional office for Europe and Central Asia](#) and the [Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#).

We are currently interested in developing ARCADIA's activity as a relevant actor in the field of Development Education. We strive to do so by promoting projects and educational initiatives which support mass-media, civil society

organizations and any other interested parties to expand their understanding of sustainable development. Using participatory education methodologies, we wish to engage such social actors in advancing their practice towards a broader, more inclusive approach to development, both locally and internationally, she told us.

Adela Militaru is the coordinator of the **Education for Sustainable Development Group (ESD Group)** within ARCADIA – the Romanian Association for International Development and Cooperation.

The Group was established in March 2015, with the aim of shaping a community of practitioners and researchers working towards a more informed approach of promoting Sustainable Development by means of Education and training. Its main focus is to provide expertise and engage stakeholders in constructive dialogue, building on evidence-based perspectives on the dimensions of Sustainable Development.

Alexandra: Education for sustainable development (ESD) was included in 3 targets in the proposed post-2015 sustainable development global agenda (Goal 4, 12 and 13) showing its importance in contributing to the achievement of different development objectives (i.e. education, sustainable consumption and climate change). In this context, the *Education for Sustainable Development Group (ESDG)* that you recently organized in Romania seems to follow the global trend and grow accordingly very fast. *What were your incentives to coagulate such a global-like group in Romania?*



Adela: At a close scrutiny of the post-2015 Agenda, the value of Education in promoting Sustainable Development seems to be of crucial importance for the next 15 years. Surely, it transcends the scope and mandate of Goal 4, that of ensuring equitable and quality education and promoting lifelong learning

opportunities for all. I would agree that education plays a big part in contributing to the success of most of the other goals: eradicating extreme poverty and ending hunger, as well as achieving gender equality, ensuring sustainable consumption patterns, raising awareness on climate change, and ensuring productive employment through better qualified workforce.

In my view, our work as ESDG is valuable precisely in the light of the recently adopted Sustainable Development global Agenda. Our purpose was to provide expertise and training to build the capacity of public institutions and the private sector, as well as civil society organizations and mass-media, to understand and develop more sustainable practices in applying the principles of sustainable development. We see this as a precondition to the success of the 2030 global agenda, and in this light, as a community of research and practice, we seek to encourage Romanian stakeholders to join the global partnership as a reliable actor in promoting sustainable development.

Alexandra: **ESD, as a concept, has the tremendous fluidity and capacity to enable different development actors to collaborate and address global issues and local priorities. How does ARCADIA's ESDG contribute to the advancement of this concept?**

Adela: Our activity reflects the well-known principle **Think globally, act locally**, in whichever setting we are active. As all ARCADIA members, ESD Group members are contributing their

expertise and specialized input to reach larger audiences in countries where they work, informing about sustainable development by means of education and training.

Using the experience of our latest project, we elaborated accessible informative materials on sustainable development, and delivered three training courses dedicated to civil society and mass-media from 3 regions of Romania. The participatory methodologies we use during our trainings and interactions with target audiences facilitated collaboration, and aimed precisely at addressing interconnected global issues with relevance for participants' own local contexts. The ESD methodology encouraged them to reflect on their experience and advance ideas on how they could tackle their local challenges in line with global priorities.

Alexandra: What are the main priorities of the first project you are working on now with the Education for Sustainable Development Group?



Adela: First of all, we seek to inform the local public on the global priorities set through the new global agenda (for example see our [Infographic – from MDGs to SDGs \(RO\)](#)). In order to do so, we created a community of trained multipliers

– civil society members and media professionals – who can contribute with their skills and knowledge to larger target audiences, promoting a broader understanding of what sustainable development is and how we can actively contribute to it.

Our trainers and multipliers are contributing with their experience to reach a larger public and inform an increasing number of actors on the urgency of committing to a more sustainable set of social, economic and environmental

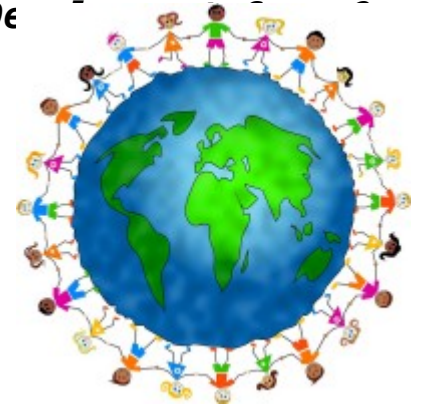
practices.

Alexandra: The ESD Group has the dynamics of a learning organization skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge. *How do you see it growing in the near future? In which direction do you aim to orient your activities?*

Adela: After addressing the target audience of civil society members and mass-media, we will transfer this knowledge to other stakeholders who promote sustainable development through their activities. Our focus for the near future relies on developing more informative material, working methods and applied research tools, adapted to local and international audiences. By this effort, we wish to encourage more effective ESD practices and evaluate their impact and alignment with the priorities to the new global agenda. For instance, at the moment we are working with a group of researchers on elaborating an Observatory of Romanian Resources for Sustainable Development Education, which will be used to monitor the impact of ESD activities implemented locally.

Looking beyond this, the future will probably challenge us to perform more and more capacity building for public institutions and private organizations, as well as provide training and consultancy to NGOs and other actors. There is huge potential of this field, and our expertise may well be of increasing interest for a wide range of actors interested in expanding their understanding of sustainable development and realigning their organizational practices with a more global, sustainable dimension.

Alexandra: *What message would you like to pass on to development workers interested in working with the concept of education for sustainable development or in other words,*



Adela: Development is happening as we speak and it is our collective responsibility to shape the direction it is growing into. A growing community of professionals believes that **education lies at the core of sustainable development** and if we are willing to join forces, our voice can become strong enough to make a difference.

Working with the Education for Sustainable Development Group will challenge all those interested to join forces in redesigning our world based on the principles of people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnership. For sure, it cannot be an easy task, but it is definitely worth our effort.

If you wish to get more information on the activity of ARCADIA's ESDG, you can join our network on http://arcadianetwork.ning.com/group/development_education, or write an email to adela.militaru@arcadianetwork.org



Adela Militaru holds a BA degree in Psychology from the University of Bucharest and she specialized in Counselling and Educational Psychology at MA level at Babeş-Bolyai University. Throughout her studies, she pursued her passion for education and training and was actively involved as trainer and mentor within several NGOs, at European and local level, including AEGEE-European Students' Forum and

PATRIR.

Curious about the world, in 2013 Adela joined an [MA programme in International Development](#) at the Faculty of Political Science of Babeş-Bolyai University, which she recently graduated from. Her passion for Education and Development led her to undertake a field research in Ahmedabad, India, that became her MA dissertation. Contributing to the capacity building of an Indian grassroots organization to increase the quality of community-based educational programs, she returned from India motivated to follow-up on this experience, and deliver the best practices she had found to other parts of the world. This experience had a tremendous influence in her decision to coagulate the Education for Sustainable Development Group.

She believes that education can change our approach towards development for the better, by fostering more inclusive, responsible, just and cohesive communities around the world.

Migration – the buzzword of the moment

Migration-related words seem to have become the buzzwords of 2015 lexicon: about 60 million refugees worldwide, millions of economic migrants, almost 100 million people dependent on everyday humanitarian aid to survive, large-scale displacements in Ukraine, millions at risk of famine in South Sudan, 5 years of conflict in Syria, 1 year of ISIS, plenty of minorities slipping into oblivion. The picture looks gloomy at the moment and the phenomenon of migration is both academically and professionally challenging.

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Alexandra: We are interviewing **Irina Mihalcut**, a young professional in international development with a strong background in migration policies.



Irina, June 2014 ©StudioAlb

The concept of *migration* has a very special meaning for you. It can be translated through many stories and serendipitous moments that have marked your personal and professional path. With a Master Degree in Migration and European Affairs from Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium) and Babes-Bolyai

University (Romania), your first professional experience with the phenomenon of migration was in Italy where you worked as a Cultural Mediator and Social and Legal counselor for a local immigration office. Before joining the team of [UNCHR](#) in Malta you have experienced the status of a foreign student in Belgium and the one of a migrant in Italy, Belgium and South Korea.

What first made you to choose migration as the core topic of your studies and then, of your profession?

Irina: Yes, as you have mentioned already, the concept of **migration** has played a very important role in my life. When I was about 13 years old, I heard from my family about an uncle of my father who ran away from Communist Romania and became a refugee in France. He was a Catholic priest in a small village in the region of Moldova and he tried to oppose the Regime through different actions in his community. Of course, he was living with the constant fear of being *stopped* by the authorities but despite that he continued his work, mainly in awakening the community through his preaching. One day, the *Securitatea* was informed and of course they took him for questioning. I do not know all the details related to what exactly happened to him after, but apparently one day he just disappeared and nobody from the family saw him again. Only after the fall of the Communism, they found out that he became a refugee in France. There, apparently, continued to work as a priest until his death. Some years ago I actually have managed, by chance, to find a book written by him during his stay in France. It is really incredible to have found a copy of that book with his signature on it. It was a very emotional moment!

This family story was the starting point for me in getting

interested in the topic of asylum and migration. It would have been great if during High School we had had some classes about migration. Not necessary as a separate subject, but somehow integrated in the curricula of another subject, like History or Social Sciences. That would have helped me understand earlier so many issues related to this phenomenon, which is part of the human history since its beginnings. Migration affects almost everybody's lives in our current society and it is important to make people think from an earlier age about the consequences of migration, the effects of conflicts and what it means to be a refugee. Only like that we can diminish and, hopefully, even eliminate rampant racism, discrimination and xenophobia which are so much prevalent in our societies these days. Only like that we can prevent the manipulation of the masses by media and politicians.

The second main reason why I became so much interested in the migration phenomenon is also a personal one. My mother has become an economic migrant in the late '90s. She was "forced" to leave Romania by the economic situation in our town and her desire to make sure that I have a better future. She had to leave me alone while I was still in High School and that had a tremendous impact on the way I have perceived and led my life afterwards. Through her experience as a migrant I have learned about the many difficulties a foreigner can encounter while working and living abroad, I learned about the emotional costs that a migrant has to pay but, I also learned about the wonderful gifts that the world can offer to these courageous people. Yes, all persons who decide to leave their country for any reason, are very courageous people. Some have it easier than others, but for all of them the hearts will always long for something left back home: their family, a friend, a special place, a dish, a landscape, a feeling, a particular time in their youth etc.

The abovementioned reasons made me become interested in the topic of migration and determined me to become a migrant

myself. Since September 2004, this life style has become my “full-time job” when I started my Master Degree in Brussels and I think I will not stop being a nomad for quite some time from now on. You know what they say? *Dust if you must, but the world’s out there/With the sun in your eyes, the wind in your hair,/A flutter of snow, a shower of rain,/This day will not come around again...* as in Rose Millingan’s [poem](#).

Alexandra: In Italy you used to work with refugees and economic migrants seeking for a better life in Western Europe. *What have been the common misconceptions about migration that you encountered in your work at the immigration office in Italy?*

Irina: Yes, I had the chance to work with refugees and economic migrants in Italy for some time in 2005 and in 2007. It was a very challenging experience for me, since I was still at the beginning of my professional career; nevertheless, during those times, I learned a lot about what I wanted to do in the future. And more than that, through interaction with colleagues from different teams I worked with I learnt how to balance emotions, reactions and actions, how to become a good professional in such a tough environment.

During those times, I understood that there are **three types of professionals working in the migration and asylum environments**: **1) the pastoral ones** – these are the ones who give everything to the people they are working for; they do not separate their personal lives from the work life; they do not have the strength to say “no” when is needed; they are the ones who are ready to listen to the life story of a person for the tenth time at three o’clock in the morning; **2) the technical ones** – these are the ones who do not shed a tear when they hear a horrific story form a war situation; they are the ones who will stop the interview with five minutes before the end of their working office hours and, even if that moment might be crucial for the status determination of that case, they do not care; **3) the techno-pastoral ones** – these are the

ones that can show compassion, but who can also say when needed *now it's enough! Take your life in your hands and start living again, do not expect the system to do it for you!*; they are the ones who separate their personal lives from the work life but who can say *Hi! How is your family? How were things for you lately?* whenever they meet a migrant/refugee on the street.

In my opinion, the first two types are often met in the migrant/refugee contexts (including in the Italian Immigration Office where I worked) and are very dangerous. The professionals falling in the first category create most of the time an emotional dependency for their clients and the ones found in the second category provoke fear and inhibition in the hearts and minds of the migrants/refugees with whom they deal with. These two categories of professionals contribute a lot to the failure of the projects and programmes they try to implement and they fuel very much the **misconceptions** about what migration and asylum seeking means. On one side, the migrants/refugees either believe that their lives are in the “hands” of the system or they just avoid telling the truth because they fear the system (depending on what type of professionals they deal with). On the other side, these failed projects and programmes are used by media to create sensational news, by politicians to create “catchy” propaganda slogans and by hosting communities to blame foreigners for their socio-economic problems.

From my point of view, the third category of professionals – *the techno-pastoral ones* – are the best. They are the ones giving the emotional comfort needed so much by the migrants and refugees, laying the foundation for trust and truth and for successful personal stories, but in the same time they are the ones ready to tell at the right moment that is time for the migrants/refugees to take their lives in their hands and not to behave constantly as vulnerable and victims.

I have mentioned these categories of professionals working in

migration and refugee contexts because I believe they are very often the main responsible for the existence of many misconceptions about migration and the way they act influences a lot how migration and asylum seeking are perceived by everybody.



Irina Mihalcut (in the middle) with her colleagues at UNHCR, World Refugee Day (2011)

Alexandra: Working with [UNCHR](#) in Malta (2009 – 2012) while the new office was opening in Valletta was definitely a great professional challenge. *What were your main tasks and how did a day-to-day work look for you? What gave you most job satisfaction?*

Irina: Yes, you are right. It was a very challenging professional experience working with UNHCR in Malta while the new national office was established. The Country Agreement between UNHCR and the Government of Malta was just signed when I arrived in the archipelago (the summer of 2009) and the initial steps for the set-up of the office had to be finalized by the end of the same year. I started my employment with UNHCR sometimes in November, mainly due to bureaucratic delays related to a slow national process for getting the work permit in Malta. Yes, I was again experiencing on my own skin what it meant to be a migrant.

I have been hired to assist the Country Representative in all aspects related to the set-up of the new office. My tasks were very technical at the beginning and mainly related to logistics, procurement, administration, human resources, IT and finance. I have received an empty building, that required a lot of repairs and improvements, and my task was to make that place a functional office. In the first months, a "normal" day at the office meant long hours of technical work and learning. I was new in Malta and in the same time it was my first experience in such a large organization built on a very complex system of rules and regulations and I had very little time to "get used to it". I had to do it fast and I had to ensure that everything was done according to the UN requirements and in accordance with the local rules and regulations.

After the whole rush for the set-up of the office has ended, I also started getting involved directly in the other activities planned by the UNHCR office. Therefore I was also going with my colleagues from the Protection and Durable Solutions departments in the open and closed centers to do registration of persons of concern (PoC), to distribute non-food items to the newly arrived, to do counseling or simply to monitor what was going on in the different locations. In 2010, due to the large number of new arrivals coming from North-Africa (due to the Arab Spring revolutions), the UNHCR office has started also an intra-European Relocation Project, in which Romania took part as well. Since our office team was small and our projects were many, I helped my colleagues in identifying and counseling the PoC to be submitted for relocation to one of the ten EU states who offered to share the burden with Malta.

In 2011, apart of all the above mentioned activities, I was also involved in the preparation of a contingency plan for Malta in coordination with the other UN agencies present in the country and with the local authorities (especially with the Maltese Civil Protection). We needed to do that so that we

could respond immediately to large influxes of asylum seekers coming in the archipelago. We set-up the first *non-food items warehouse* in Western Europe and that implied a lot of coordination with our offices from the region, from the HQ and from the Middle-East (where the items were shipped from), with shipping companies and of course with the local Maltese authorities.

During the three years I have spent with UNHCR Malta, I did a lot of interesting activities and my days of work were extremely diverse, because I was interested in learning a bit from all the departments. I was hired for a very technical post but I wanted to be also close to the PoC as much as possible. My joy and satisfaction during this professional experience came from seeing my team happy because they had a functional office and from the reactions of the different PoC that I have interacted with. For example, one day in 2011 I have received a phone call from one of the Ethiopian refugees that I worked with. He called me to tell that he was accepted to be relocated to Norway (where one of his brothers was living) and he wanted to thank me for the way I encouraged him one day while I did a visit in the center where him and his family were hosted. He said that my kind words and the way I behaved gave him courage and hope, and that was a turning point in his life which marked the beginning of a new personal chapter. That was an emotional moment for me and I was given an insight into what an important role me and my colleagues had in the life of those people. I still keep in touch with him and I am so happy to hear that him and his family are achieving so much in their new home country.

From this professional experience I learned that no matter what you do, if you do it with enthusiasm, if the things you accomplish are done with love and a sense of purpose, then you can change lives.

Alexandra: In Romania, you were the National Focal Point for Romania for the [European Resettlement Network](#) (2013-2014).

During that period, 40 selected Iraqi refugees have been resettled from their camp in Turkey to Romania. These days there is a huge debate about hosting a certain quota of refugees from Syria in Romania. *From your experience gathered during the abovementioned experience, how would you assess the main challenges encountered by the responsible authorities and the Romanian civil society during the current debate about welcoming and integrating refugees?*

Irina: Indeed, in my role as **ERN NFP for Romania**, I had the chance to get involved also in the different discussions held at the national level, about the resettlement of 40 Iraqi refugees to Romania. During those discussions it became very clear that Romania had still a lot of difficulties in welcoming and facilitating the integration of persons in need of protection. There were **several factors** that contributed and still contribute to this situation: **1) the Romanian asylum system is still quite young, 2) the lack of real coordination between the different non-governmental organization in the country is still present, 3) the economic problems and the lack of jobs at the national level are current topics, 4) the small immigrant communities present in the country, 5) the low involvement of the administrative authorities from the local levels and of course 6) the desire of the refugees to have a better new start in life which would be assured by a more developed country in the Western of Europe.**

When we think about welcoming asylum seekers and persons with a form of protection, both in Romania and in Europe in general, we have to remember that we are talking about saving lives first of all and, in my opinion, this element is often placed on a secondary place by the different actors involved in the discussions. Recently the President, Mr. Iohannis said that Romania is ready to welcome 1785 in need of protection while the EU said that Romania should take 6351. When I hear these discussions I feel like we are at a market where things can be negotiated. **No, lives cannot be negotiated!**

I understand the different issues connected to receiving new asylum seekers, especially when they come from a very different social and religious context, but we do have to open our country and our continent to saving as many people as possible no matter where are they coming from, no matter how educated they are and no matter how strong they are. I still remember the ridiculous criteria used by some countries in receiving refugees for relocation from Malta. They had to be Christians, educated, to speak one foreign language, to not need special medical care and/ or to not want family reunification.

Did Romanians forget that we were “exporting” refugees during Communism? Did Europeans forget that a total of about 60 million Europeans became refugees during the entire World War II period and that (according to the UN) a million people had yet to find a place to settle down by 1951, more than five years after the fighting stopped? What would have happened to those Europeans if the borders would have been closed for them when trying to escape war and famine?

Of course, there are some countries better equipped than others that can accept persons in need of protection, but this is a very cheap excuse from some European governments (especially in the Eastern Europe) and it is time to look at values that are beyond economical and financial matters: like hospitality and humanity.

At the same time, it is the moment for **the finalization of a common European Asylum system** and for a bigger freedom of movement within the EU borders for all persons with a form of protection. If it will be put in place an easier way for these persons to move and to compete for the labour market around the EU member states, then there will be less trafficking and less irregular work. There will be less traumatized people, less „asylum shopping” and more competition on the labour market which, on a longer term, will inevitably motivate both the European citizens and the persons with a form of

protection to learn new skills and develop personally and professionally.

Imagine if all asylum seekers would be allowed to work and study immediately after their registration with the local authorities, then there will be a smaller need for financial support from the local entities and those persons would learn immediately more about the hosting society, they would be able to make friends from amongst the locals, they would learn the local language faster and they would keep themselves busy while waiting for the result of their status determination. Briefly, the process of integration would be much faster and more successful! In my opinion, if governments around Europe would focus more on supporting and welcoming than on prohibiting and limiting, the current situation would not be defined as a “refugee crisis” but rather a “new page in the European humanitarian intervention”.



Alexandra: **Less than one month ago, the new Sustainable Development Goals have been adopted by the world leaders gathered at the UN Summit in New York. The goal no. 10 and more specifically the target 10.7 include specific references related to migrants and the migration phenomenon. How would**

you comment the importance given to migration in the current Post-2015 Agenda?

Irina: While I was working as NFP for ERN in Romania, I had the opportunity to participate in July 2014 to the Development Camp organized by FOND Romania. That edition was dedicated to the discussions related to the international agenda post 2015 and it was part of the “global conversations” meant to identify the priority areas to be addressed in the SDG goals. During the discussions held there it became clear that

migration had to be included in the list of specific targets for the new development goals because this phenomenon is an integral part of the international development. Foreigners can contribute very much to the diversification of local economies and can refresh the local societies. Because of their presence the locals will find a stronger motivation to learn new skills and find new opportunities. In most of the cases, every migrant contributes to the global fight for reducing the social and economical inequalities. If all people can assert their interests without the fear of becoming “illegals or irregulars” the process of reducing poverty around the world will go much faster. I am very glad to see that migration was included in the list of targets for the new development goals. The now expired MDGs did not mention anything specific about migrants or persons in need of international protection and it was about time to include this topic in the global agenda.

“Regular and responsible migration and mobility of people”, “implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies” are notions much needed in the new global agenda. The MDGs were meant to be applied to all the countries in the world but in fact they became targets for poor countries to achieve with financial support from the wealthy states and, the inclusion of a topic like “migration” shifts the pressure on all the countries (including the wealthy ones) to contribute to the achievement of the new goals.

Alexandra: The daily path never ends says an African/ Masai proverb. A couple of months ago, you moved to Tanzania where you work with a local NGO. Could you tell us more about your projects over there? How does this experience match with your migration-related professional background?



Lugarawa, Tanzania (2015)

Irina: I arrived in Tanzania at the end of February 2015 and immediately after I have started my collaboration with a local foundation. I live in a small village (of about 2000 people) in the Southern-Highlands of Tanzania, not far from the border with Malawi, in a very fertile and picturesque area, but where the majority of people live beneath the poverty line and the population is heavily dependent on subsistence farming and various forms of aid. It is my first time in Africa and I am so lucky to live this experience in this village. I have decided to work with the foundation because I understood from my first meeting with the team that they are different. The motivation for doing something for their community and for contributing to the development of their region, was originating from their hearts and not from a foreign impulse or from a personal financial desire.

They are all volunteers and they did all their projects with very little financial support. The team is made mainly of doctors, teachers and business owners. It is a small team but, due to their energy and dedication, together we managed to achieve a lot in a very short time.

As Program Officer, I take care (among other things) of launching and coordinating new projects, of managing fund-raising actions, of planning new strategies and of changing the image of the foundation. Some of the projects we did in the past months included activities related to: 1) childrens

rights; 2) respecting and protecting the environment; 3) prevention of conflicts; 4) identification of young leaders in the community; 5) supporting small business ideas; 6) identification of causes for poor performance in schools.

We did also a lot of meetings with local villagers, with students and local leaders during which we discussed also about asylum and refugees. We did this mainly because of two reasons: 1) Tanzania started receiving new asylum seekers coming from Burundi, due to the civil unrest related to the latest Burundian Presidential elections and 2) Tanzania has been preparing for national elections which will take place towards the end of October 2015. During our discussions we emphasised the fact that Tanzania is the most peaceful country in the region (and has been like this since its independence in the '60s) and the only way for this country to remain like this is for its inhabitants to continue living peacefully in diversity and to continue working assiduously on preventing conflicts.

Apart of the above mentioned activities, we have recently organized a festival, which involved the communities from three villages. The festival had several components, including: 1) awareness about protecting the environment (in special the de-forestation of the mountains and the impact on the water sources in the area); 2) to re-connect those born in the area and who migrated to other destinations with their home communities; 3) the development of a ethno-historical research about the region; and 4) "planting the seeds" for the construction of a community center (where locals could have a library, could take various courses, could make cultural meetings).

The work that I currently do is not related to managing migration, however, it has provided me with an insight into the importance of migration at a micro level. For example, I understand better now the necessity of migration for personal socio-economic development (mainly related to access to

education and labor market mobility) and the restrictions that potential migrants meet due to limited resources, high costs and lack of a network for information and experience exchange. **And, yet another time, I am experiencing the life of a migrant. I am learning a new language, I am discovering a new culture and the most important, I understand much better what are the best ways of working efficiently in international development projects.**

Brain drain. Brain gain. The power of networking and the story of ARCADIA

The constant movement of skilled professionals and students from one from one country to another represents **brain gain** for the countries that reap their capacities and experience and **brain drain** for their home countries. Nevertheless, in a globalized world the **brain circulation** is becoming a reality and the debate about **brain regain** goes beyond bringing the experts back to their home-countries. **Leveraging the new online tools and the power of networks sending countries can reconnect with their experts without the need of having them in person.**

Especially, in the field of international development cooperation, professionals with a very diverse background (from finance to health and food security) thrive to put their skills and experience in the most disadvantaged regions in the world and address the causes of poverty in the world. It is a natural choice for development professionals to move abroad and travel in order to be where their work is needed most.

They usually serve in international organizations, NGOs and consultancies and are ready to adapt in accordance to current development priorities. Romania has strengthened its engagement with the field of international development cooperation; and many Romanians work in this field across the globe.



In this context, [ARCADIA – The Romanian Association for International Cooperation and Development](#) – had the main objective to establish **a network of Romanian professionals with transferable skills and plenty of experiences to share**. Through specific activities and working groups created around different topics we engage these experts and “bring back” their expertise fuelling the development of a specific community of practice at national level.

In order to find out more about this phenomenon, we are interviewing Mr **Ștefan Cibian**, the president of ARCADIA.

Alexandra: The gap between brain drain and brain gain has been approached by ARCADIA as an opportunity for exchanging experiences and setting new ways for project-based working. Ștefan, as a community builder, how would you describe the mission and motivation that create the network-like dynamics of ARCADIA?



Ștefan: ARCADIA naturally draws membership from around the world. Given the nature of the field, the professionals

concerned with international development relocate, may times, to work in various areas of the world. In that context, ARCADIA's mission is to enhance knowledge and professional expertise in international development, by providing a community space where professionals continue to learn, while sharing own insights and working in collaborative projects. Each practitioner, scholar, expert, policy-maker, journalist and student engaged in this field brings a wealth of knowledge and experience at the table. By providing learning and sharing spaces, ARCADIA aims to both build more capacity in this field and take the field further.

One important result from ARCADIA's work is that the knowledge and experience arrived at in practice is shared with others. **In Romania's context, in a field where brain drain is implicit in the profession, such learning spaces provide the soft infrastructure necessary for brain regain.** The brain regain is multiplied by the openness of the network to professionals from anywhere in the world and by the focus put on professionals based in Romania. As such, the brain regain is not merely the reverse of the brain-drain, but much more, tapping into the knowledge resources available currently at an international level and at the same time building connections to the broader international development community.

Alexandra: Network organizations are not very common in Romania. Nevertheless, the network approach as a deliberate strategy for the non-governmental sector may have a tremendous social impact enabling members to create/ join various projects and thus, put together different approaches, skills, and capacities. How can the example of ARCADIA benefit to the non-governmental sector in terms of strategy, partnerships, and expertise?

Ștefan: The main nuggets of knowledge come from struggles, challenges and outright failure. Therefore, to meaningfully address your question, it is important to be opened about the lessons ARCADIA learnt in the process of setting up the

community of professionals. I see a bundle of challenges that interrelate. These are: **challenges related to the *mission*, challenges related to *building adequate learning spaces* and challenges related to *sustainability*.**

Being a professional association that aims to grow the field – a field that is re-emerging after decades of decay – offers ARCADIA a dual challenge: *first*, it emerges in a context where such type of organizations is uncommon or dysfunctional (except maybe the professional organizations set up through special laws); *second*, embarking to support a field that is only recently acknowledged nationally, adds a strong field-building mission to ARCADIA's work, making it important not only to build a community of professionals, but also to contribute to the emergence of the field through its action.

The *lessons* learnt here are that we need more collective efforts to build stronger initiatives that create knowledge and capacity in various fields, that each field has a number of professionals that are strongly motivated and grow through engaging in professional networks and communities; and while not easy, building a professional community brings a lot of satisfaction from seeing the field, people and the community grow.

A second challenge relates to building adequate learning spaces, more broadly to building processes of all sorts (organizational, community, learning-related, etc). There is little capacity in general in the civil society and universities to design good processes and that leaves a mark in our context as well. The types of engagements that professionals take do not lead in the short to medium term to building well-designed learning processes. The lessons learned are that **we need to invest more in this area and pay additional attention to designing the interactions and learning spaces.**

The last category of challenges relates to the sustainability

of both the community and the organization. In terms of financial sustainability, professional organizations are not on the radar for any of the main public and private donors in Romania. In terms of organizational sustainability, we find that success can only come from engaging proactively professionals for a longer period of time. The lessons-learned here are that **we need to advocate more for investments in knowledge services and organizations working with knowledge across sectors – academic, implementation, policy, media and that we need to invest more in building sustainability models for professional and knowledge-focused organizations.**

Alexandra: Who are the Romanians in development or, in other words, who are the professionals that joined ARCADIA and have supported its activities?

Ştefan: There is a wide range of professionals involved in ARCADIA and its activities. There are practitioners in development working in various parts of the world who contribute with input from wherever they are. There are also practitioners who have lived in developing countries and have returned back to Romania who continue to contribute to developing the field here. An important component of the membership relates to the academic environment – academics, researchers, and students. Also, media practitioners interested in development are present in the network.

Alexandra: As a network of experts and professionals in the field of international development and cooperation, ARCADIA enables members to focus on their cause in a very entrepreneurial way. How does the organization work?

Ştefan: The most important benefits that come from a network appear when members assume leadership on issues of interest. In ARCADIA we provide the necessary space for professionals and their organizations to propose initiatives and lead their implementation. The organization facilitates the activity of working-groups, the online review, conferences, workshops,

training sessions, etc. and each of the members can use the space for proposing initiatives and contributing with content. In doing so they are supported by the organizational core to be able to setup the new projects and launch their first initiatives and activities.

Alexandra: The development of expertise (in any field of practice) requires coaches and trainers who are willing to share from their professional history, giving constructive feedback. If we consider ARCADIA as a learning community that is benefiting its members, how would you assess the learning opportunities provided by the association?

Ştefan: We have been concerned in the last years with the number of people embarking on a career in this field and have tested several methods for enhancing the career opportunities for young practitioners and students. We put in place a mentorship program. We have organized training sessions for young practitioners and students and have built a network of academic advisors for the students doing research on development. Furthermore we offered, with the support of the MFA and UNDP Romania, [scholarships](#) for students carrying out research in partner countries. What we see as a key modality for enhancing learning among peers is the further development and consolidation of working groups as well as facilitating more events (both virtual and in person) where such sharing and learning is made possible.

Alexandra: *Considering the new dynamics of the post-2015 agenda, what are the directions that the organization is willing to embrace in the future?*



Ştefan: The major shift that comes with the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), in my view, is the universalization of the development targets. That implies erasing at some

conceptual level the distinction between developed and developing countries. Such move can have a positive or a negative impact – negative, if certain perspectives of the world continue to be prevalent and imposed. Positive, if this move enables more voices and approaches at the table and if it enables us to recognize the uniqueness of each developing context (be it in a formerly developing or developed environment). This change impacts ARCADIA, as the professionals in the network will become more open to Romania's experience with development and the value-added they can bring to the internal debates on development challenges.

Alexandra: What message would you like to pass on to current and potential members interested in getting to know ARCADIA?

Ştefan: To simply be creative in shaping learning experiences within and outside the ARCADIA community and also to take initiative and put that creativity in action.

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Mr Ştefan Cibian is currently visiting professor at the MA Programme in International Development of Babes-Bolyai University and program development coordinator at the Association for Community Relations – Community Foundations Program. He holds an MA in Public Policy and a Ph.D in Political Science-International Relations and European Studies from Central European University (CEU). He worked for the European Commission (Brussels and Dakar) and CEU (as a teaching assistant).

If you have any questions about ARCADIA, please do not hesitate to contact Ştefan at stefan.cibian@arcadianetwork.org

The #EYD2015 at a glance: perspectives from Brussels

Interviewing Mr [Victor Negrescu](#), the youngest Romanian Member of the European Parliament (MEP) since the integration of Romania in the European Union in 2007.



Elected in May 2014, he became member in the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and a permanent member of the Committee on Budgets and the Delegation to the ACP-EU JPA. Victor Negrescu has an important professional

and academic experience in both politics and Political Science and has worked for several years already in promoting development cooperation policies and European values in Romania. With a PhD on European development cooperation policies he is the founder of the National School of Political and Administrative Studies English taught MA program on development, international cooperation and humanitarian aid.

He is also well-known for his interesting mix of projects and initiatives that blend local Romanian interests with global open-minded approaches. Thus, the winner of the [MEP Awards 2015](#) for his work on [the Digital Agenda for Europe](#) is also the one who brought the regional features of Romania close to Brussels through his project “Delegation of Transylvania and Banat” and tried to improve the access to healthcare in rural communities due to his 1 million EUR initiative “Access to Health for people in rural areas”.

Alexandra: This year, we celebrated the [European Year for Development](#) (EYD2015). Could you tell us more about the

European Parliament's participation in



Victor: I believe that it is very important that the European Union decided to celebrate the European Year for Development. The European Parliament completely supports the popularization of the concept of development and the need for a stronger debate on the role of the European Union and of the member states in the implementation of development policies. Therefore several debates have been already organized in the EP premises and almost at every plenary we discuss about a topic related to development. Just recently we discussed about the efficiency of development aid funds and the necessity to focus more the cooperation on sustainable projects in partnership with the beneficiaries.

Nevertheless I am one of the MEPs who believe that we could have done more. It is clear that in the context of the refugee crisis the world needs the EU and the member states to get more involved in developing countries. In order to do so we need to raise awareness on the necessity to allocate more resources to development cooperation policies but also to involve more our citizens. Public support and development education are necessary for stronger policies, and the EYD2015 should be the instrument that the European Parliament should use to enable a wider participation. Events as such are important not only for sending a strong political message – creating the conditions for sustainable and inclusive growth requires not only different policy instruments, but also a socially responsible attitude from the people, when acting as economic actors.

Alexandra: At the end of September 2015, the final post-2015 outcome, comprising 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets have been at the [UN Summit](#) in NYC. An [EP delegation](#) from the DEVE Committee participated to this Summit and passed on the message and the commitments of the European Union and its Member States. *From your point of view, what message should the European Union pass on after the UN Summit?*

Victor: I think that the European Union should prove again that it is the largest international donor but also the most pro-active world power in relation to development issues. The European Union has to assume the targets but also to promote the Sustainable Development Goals. That means that the EU should prove that contrary to the failure of the Millennium Development Goals, this time there is no space for a detour.

The European Union has to assume this responsibility as well as to engage with the other partners in reaching true global targets that all parties are going to support. The EU can play therefore the role of a leader but also of a negotiator capable in bringing everyone to the same table and pushing for a more responsible attitude towards our future. It is clear that the EU has to make sure that the Sustainable Development Goals do not remain only nice phrases in the speeches that took place at the UN Summit, but actually transform in concrete policies at global, national and local level. Leading by example can be one of the tactics that the EU should adopt in order to obtain larger support for attaining the SDGs.

Alexandra: In comparison to the MDGs that have been dedicated to ending poverty in developing countries, the SDGs will explicitly broaden their focus to all countries, “poor, rich and middle-income countries”, including all the members of the EU. Therefore, they also have to come up with a new just sustainable social and economic model applicable in their own societies. *What actions do you think policymakers and implicitly the members of the European Parliament need to take in order to promote and support the new global development*

agenda at home, in all EU countries?

Victor: This change of including all countries in the Sustainable Development Goals is an important step in making everyone aware that we need to construct a more just and sustainable social and economic model. Therefore a stronger involvement is needed from decision makers at every level.

The first step is to raise awareness regarding the UN Summit decisions and the SDGs. From public debates to education, the SDGs have to become a reference for the citizens and the development perspectives of all societies.



In parallel it is important for everyone, again at every level, to establish clear objectives with concrete benchmarks. Therefore a decision on the European SDGs at European level by the Commission and the European Parliament can be a starting point. This can be followed by national decisions with a wide participation of the civil society in order to transform the SDGs in a development strategy.

Finally we need to identify clear projects and actions that can raise support and public participation around these commitments. From public campaigns to activities that involve the public administration, more resources have to be used support the new global development agenda.

Alexandra: The [European Consensus on Development](#) (2006), the [Agenda for Change](#) (2012) and the [Multiannual Financial Framework](#) (2014-2020) are only a few of the most important documents that set out specific guidance for planning and implementation of the development assistance component of all EU instruments and cooperation strategies with developing partners. The European Consensus was adopted in 2005 in response to the MDGs and in 2012, the Agenda for Change came

as a *de facto* update of the second part. Is the EU preparing a new update of the European Consensus in response to the adoption of the sustainable development agenda?

Victor: There have been debates on the need to work on a new document presenting the guidelines of the EU development assistance policy. At the level of the European Commission there are several active debates on a need to merge the SDG and the EU2020 strategy in order to establish a broad consensus on the development agenda of the European Union.

We are still at an initial stage of these debates but you can be assured that I will contribute as much as possible to the implementation in a clear document of the SDG.

Moreover, I believe that the process of updating the EU's development agenda needs to be taken up responsibly – the new priorities need to become true benchmarks of our dedication to solve the major issues of the continent and not a set of desires we want to see accomplished with the passing of decades. The EU needs to learn from the global lesson, but also from its own institutional history – setting up new policies requires adequate resources and the necessary resolve to see them through. In addition, I believe that at least some of the paramount goals for European development, once set, should not become the object of political trading and negotiation.

Alexandra: **As a member of the [Delegation to the ACP- EU JPA](#), could you tell us how do you think the new global agenda will influence the EU external policies, priorities and allocations, namely in the ACP area?**



Victor: I believe that the European Union needs to face up to reality and see that it cannot continue this ambivalent attitude towards globalization

and its effects. The EU cannot portray itself as an actor with a global reach and at the same time try to stem the effects of globalization by resorting to outdated policies and models of political action. Many issues on the European public agenda – combating climate change, seeking a solution to immigration, raising the living standards, creating the premises for sustainable development – have a profound global component and we need to stand up to this fact.

Consequently, while the ACP Area definitely has its own characteristics, many of the challenges it faces stem not from particular dynamics, but are part of larger global processes that the EU can and should influence. I believe that the EU's position as the largest donor in the world needs to be taken up responsibly and that the EU needs to adapt its foreign policy and assistance for development instruments in order to raise the efficiency of its actions.

The EU needs a more coherent approach towards the ACP area. A fair partnership has to be established involving the civil society and the citizens from the ACP area in the direction of a common development. A new approach is needed not only based on aid but on a true guidance and assistance of those countries towards development.

Moreover, I think that the EU is in itself an institutional model with enough flexibility and resistance to tackle the effects of globalization – in the end, accommodating the varying interests of such a large number of members offers an example for managing the challenges brought about by globalization.

Alexandra: According to the [World Bank](#) and [Eurostat](#), Romania- an upper middle income country with one of the highest poverty rates in the EU- is still struggling with numerous social and economic challenges. *Having in mind the new post-2015 agenda and knowing very well the realities of our country, how would*

you tailor the SDGs to the realities of Romania in order to create better life conditions? On which objectives/ area would you put special emphasis?

Victor: While the Romanian context has its own peculiarities, the cluster-like manner of establishing the SDGs is a useful method in assessing Romania's future objectives for development. As the World Bank and Eurostat statistics point out, Romania is a country of contrasts and therefore bolder thinking and considerate planning are both needed in order to chart out a course for the future.

We have managed to move away from the harshest consequences of inept austerity policies that have crippled our healthcare and education systems, but we still need to act more on this front. We have done a great job in achieving economic growth, after a period of collapse that has made a serious impact on the livelihood of the poorest citizens of our country. It is high time we moved towards strengthening the conditions for a sustainable, but also inclusive growth model.

We need at the same time to raise the awareness and also our profile in combating climate change – climate change is not something that happens on the news or in developing countries, outside our continent. It is a phenomenon that will affect us increasingly in the coming years.

Last, but not least, we should consolidate our efforts towards building a more inclusive society. Unfortunately, and not because of a desire in public policies, the Romanian society is still characterized by social exclusion: gender equality, social mobility in the context of increasing inequality, racial or ethnic discrimination, these are all symptoms of a what remains a very narrow public space that needs to be expanded in real terms.

We are Together for Development

[Together for Development](#) is a grassroots initiative founded in 2012 in Washington DC by a group of young professionals (economists, diplomats, lawyers, engineers, etc.) who aimed to come up with a different approach and development aid design.

This is a very frank interview with **Alexandru Ciorobea**, the founder and CEO of Together for Development.

Alexandra: Alex, how would you describe the concept behind Together for development?



Alexandru Ciorobea: I would describe it as a down to earth alternative to dealing with poverty and aid-dependency in small communities who

have a lucrative business idea, but zero access to capital, information or other resources. [Together](#) is about addressing poverty through targeted, measurable and accountable economic empowerment. What does that mean? Actually it's pretty simple:

you cannot be serious about poverty and social development as long as you do not go down to their root causes. Among the worst of which is the lack of access to information about existing opportunities, corroborated with a chronic lack of access to the capital needed to generate development and growth.



Our aim is simple: deal with poverty one community at a time,

with clear timelines, objectives and benchmarks. We don't discuss politics, we don't advertise and definitely don't spend resources juggling truisms about development, human rights and such. There are plenty others who are already doing a fantastic job on that department. We deal instead with concrete projects that translate into small businesses that translate on their turn into steady incomes for the respective communities that further translate into better living conditions and in the end, in saying that those communities are no longer poor or aid-dependent. Simple as that.

Alexandra: Over the last 25 years, the number of donors, non-governmental organizations, foundations, corporations, charities and other stakeholders interested in bringing a change in poor communities living with 1.25 or 2 dollars per day in Africa and South Asia has grown enormously. Nevertheless, despite the fact that recent poverty estimates show a notable decline in extreme poverty, serious criticisms is very often attached to the aid industry.

As a former UN expert and diplomat, how would you assess the progress made by international institutions, civil society and governments in tackling extreme poverty and achieving the MDGs?

Alexandru Ciorobea: First of, in order to "assess the progress" of something – anything, for that matter – we need to make sure that we have enough reliable referential data and performance indicators available, against which we should compare our "progress".

On this particular topic – the "progress of the MDG's" – there are two approaches: the official, "correct" and almost non-debatable one, widely advertised all over the mainstream media who wouldn't dare to say anything against the morality powerhouse which is the UN; and then, the "hush-hush" version, whispered from behind the scenes, usually over a lousy coffee in the UN cafeterias. The latter category rarely sees the

print or make it into the mainstream. A notable exception was the “Oil For Food” scandal, from which Kofi Annan, the artisan of the Millennium Declaration came out pretty wrinkled.

However, on the topic at hand, at least at this point, nobody in their right mind would risk his/her career and credibility by whistling in the church of multilateralism and by criticizing the excellent work carried out behind closed-doors by so many honorable experts. I can say that, because I myself was once one of those “experts” wasting long sleepless nights fighting over the placement of comas in some obscure non-compulsory resolutions or fighting over the most benign synonyms to replace anything that sounded remotely compulsory, in scores of toothless resolutions.

Well, just to give a little context to what I’ve just said – I expect to have raised at least a couple of eyebrows by now.

How did the MDGs come into being? In the late 90s, Kofi Annan was looking to find a way to keep development and poverty eradication on the agenda at a time when the interest on global issues seemed to be waning, while the international image of the UN was still severely bruised after the Rwandan and Bosnian fiascos. He came up with the [Millennium Declaration](#) – something befitting the symbolism of the year 2000 and in the meantime something that could be universally accepted as “good and righteous”, channeling the energies of the international community in a more positive direction, away from the peacekeeping resounding failures. It was a striking document defining a set of shared values and commitments to a range of goals, collected from previously agreed outcome documents adopted in various international summits. Lacking the force of international law or the enforcement mechanisms of international treaties, Annan and his colleagues needed a way to maintain political and financial support for what came to be known as the “world’s biggest promise.”

Right from the outset, the MDGs came with serious design

flaws. However, these flaws were perfectly understandable considering the haste with which the goals were agreed upon and collated in the backrooms of the UN by a small number of high level bureaucrats from a handful of multilateral organizations.

As a result of the somewhat undemocratic and opaque process by which the MDGs were drafted, the goals and targets were somewhat sketchy and their flaws became quickly apparent to the people on the field who needed to translate them into actual reality...

Concretely, let's look a little bit against what benchmarks we were expected to evaluate the progress made in 15 years:

- For many of the targets, reliable data collection simply did not exist or was of poor quality, or its insufficient coverage made it irrelevant for any serious statistical analysis. You can imagine that this was the case with many African, Central American and even Asian states in which data collection was very difficult, unreliable or just impossible, considering the local sources and the objective contexts in which it took place... Just think of all the countries that were affected by raging civil wars or were engaged in military conflicts during the 90s and the 2000s... How would you collect accurate data from there and even more so, against what data would you assess their progress later on? Furthermore, by backdating the benchmarks of the goals to 1990 – yes, the goals and specific targets were decided upon and designed in 2000, but the referential thresholds were backdated with a whole decade – the challenge of data collection was made worse, even if we are to admit just that the quality of statistical data available was worse in 1990 than in 2000.

- Even the indicators for which data collection was more reliable were highly suspect. For example, the World Bank's "International Poverty Line" that was set at \$1.25 according to 2005 purchasing power parity per day (the PPP) was set by

an unsubstantiated method – it was widely criticized by expert economists ever since – as it was based on random purchasing power conversions, while also being highly dependent on the base year selected for converting the domestic currency into US dollars... Only think that the purchasing power of \$1.25 in 1990 was dramatically different from that of 2000 and even more so, of that of 2015 after you factor in the inflation, a severe and prolonged world economic crisis and spiking prices for essential goods. So, yes, according to the \$1.25 benchmark the statistics look definitely better, however, the reality on the ground tells a different story considering the small adjustment details just mentioned. Concretely, if 25 years ago a Cameroonian family of four could fare reasonably well with a combined revenue of \$75 per month, at the 1990s PPP levels, well, I can assure you that the same is definitely not possible in 2015 when the prices have gone wild especially in import dependent economies, additionally plagued by irresponsibly high import tariffs for everything you can think of...

– Furthermore, by selecting targets that disregarded a country's starting point on all relevant fields, their available resources or capacity to implement structural reforms, the assessment of the MDGs, at national level, made it almost impossible for the worst off countries in the list to be successful. For example, consider a country that had to cut poverty by half. If we consider that 20% of the population lives under the poverty line, then 10% of the population was expected to make it above the \$1.25/day threshold in a 15 year period. This would be reasonably manageable, considering that the starting point was not so steep to start with. But for a country with a poverty rate of 60%, the challenge is obviously completely different, as it needs to cut poverty by 30% of the total population in the same 15 years, while starting from the premise that the latter country would obviously be marred with more complicated challenges than the former, while having far fewer resources at its disposal. Also, nobody took into

account the demographic increase of the countries most affected by the issues considered under the MDGs.

– And now one of my “favorite” objections: many of the indicators used to measure progress were revised during the MDG process. For example, one of the most recent ones to be revised was the indicator for measuring progress against chronic malnutrition. When do you think this happened? Five years into the process, or maybe eight? No, it happened in 2012, in the 22nd year of the referential period, when FAO leisurely presented „a new and improved” methodology for counting the chronically undernourished. In essence, what this „new” methodology did, was no less than to change the very definition of chronic undernourishment according to which a steadily **rising** number of people affected by hunger was turned into a steadily **falling** trend-line. Moreover, this new definition completely disregards a tiny little detail that would have mixed-up the numbers: during the economic crisis, between 2008-2012 there was a dramatic increase in world food prices that affected especially the people living in those countries that were expected to make the longest leaps... In fact, what FAO is telling us – with the approval of its own Executive Board and that of ECOSOC – is that according to its new, innovative method to do the counting, the number of 1 billion people malnourished from 1990 has actually fallen to „just” 800 mil., conveniently forgetting that in 2009 it reported that the number of malnourished people – according to its own old criteria! – had broken the ceiling of 1 billion, for the first time in human history.

Essentially it’s about changing the rules during the game if you’re not too comfy with the performance of your favorite team. This way of cosmetizing inconvenient truths is neither new, nor original. It’s widely used by PR companies that are paid top dollar to make their clients look good for their investors. Unfortunately, in the case of the MDGs, the impact of these “adjustments” or “revisions” was to alter the

perception regarding the progress made towards objectives that were too important to miss. However, even with these funny tricks, the discrepancies between the desired results and the realities on the ground were so steep that no auditor would have agreed to push the scalpel any further, even for the sake of the greater good.

– Lastly – and with this I promise I will end my list of personal reservations: no serious discussion was carried out regarding 1. the mechanisms by which these goals were to be achieved and 2. how states and international organizations would be held accountable for their failure to deliver on their commitments to uphold the MDGs.

However, in spite of all my objections – stemming from what I gathered during my work with those directly concerned by the success or failure of the MDGs and also by taking part directly to the mechanics behind the drafting of such goals – certain progresses have undoubtedly been achieved. But all these progresses were made possible, and are the most apparent, in those states in which the local authorities proved real commitment to the greater good of their people rather than keeping with the consecrated formula “rip the benefits as long as you have the power”. I’m thinking of the likes of Rwanda, Botswana, Ghana, Ethiopia, Egypt, Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia, Sri Lanka etc. Of course, there are many caveats regarding those indicators that are not included among the MDGs, such as the progress toward a viable rule of law, respect for human rights, fight against corruption, democratization, environmental protection etc.

In conclusion, regardless of the specifics and of all the bickering around whether the MDGs were effective or not, the very fact that now we have expanded the conversation and the member states of the UN have hit the “refresh” button by adopting the SDGs is a clear indicator that the will is there and that the remaining problems are duly acknowledged. The most important achievement of the MDGs, in my opinion, besides

the actual improvements on the ground, is that the conversation is still open and that the international community has stepped up its pledges towards a much more comprehensive development agenda.

*Alexandra: I heard about your work at **Together for Development** from the ad of the crowdfunding campaign "[Project Kribi- Time to Make a Difference](#)" that aimed to empower a small fishing community of 200 people from Kribi (Cameroon). The organization's approach, probably based on the oft-quoted saying *Give a man a fish and you will feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you will feed him for a lifetime*, was to create a sustainable business model equipping fishermen with necessary fishing tools and helping them store/ transport/ sell their fish products on other markets than the local one in Kribi oversaturated with same products.*

Alex, how would you describe your activity as a development worker within the MDGs framework?

Alexandru Ciorobea: Quite easy: our projects, at a micro-scale, aim to meet all 8 goals and many of the targets of the SDGs, not in 15 years, but in 3. For example, with our first project in Cameroon, "Project Kribi", by setting up a lucrative cooperative in a small, homogenous community, in only 6 months of activity we achieved the following:

- The daily average income per capita for all the active members of the cooperative is currently at \$9, compared to \$2.3, as it was before our collaboration;
- Obviously nobody is going to bed hungry anymore in our community;
- Several women in the community are now involved in the administration of the cooperative and they can now keep away from taking up risky activities;
- All children in the community attend school and benefit from medical assistance;
- There was no case of child or maternal death since we

started the project and considering that our members can now afford quality medical services, this is not a matter of concern anymore;

- HIV/AIDS is not an issue in our community;
- Currently all households have access to safe drinking water.

Furthermore, encouraged by the results of this project, we are just about to start a new one this month, into a larger community from the central region of Cameroon. This new project is focused on agricultural development and ecological sustainability. You can say that this new project is an upscaling of the previous one, with a wider demographic impact.

Plus, and perhaps most importantly, considering that our projects have clear deadlines and terms of completion – including even terms to define their failure – we definitely stand against perpetuating the lucrative policy of aid-dependency.

So, I guess you could say that by implementing the concept of Together we are trying to play our tiny role in bringing the MDGs and now the SDGs closer to their intended targets. As I was saying: making a difference one community at a time.

Alexandra: The UN Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda is taking place these days at the UN HQ in NYC. We seem to have everything in the new 17 goals and their 169 targets. Nevertheless, as you have could experience yourself in your work, what matters at the end of each and every day are concrete results: kids in schools, drinking water delivered in all homes around the world, rural electrification, law enforcement in violence-prone areas, sustainable businesses, less aid dependency, and the list can go on forever.

What are your hopes and fears regarding the SDGs?

How do you think the new post-development agenda will restructure the development work in the next 15 years in order to make better happen?

Alexandru Ciorobea: These are tough questions. The first: after the experience of the MDGs and based on my own conclusions since I started working outside the very protective umbrella of the „official capacity”, I could say that my hopes became also my fears. After you go through several reality checks along the way, you come to realize that when your hopes meet with a very unpredictable reality, it is only natural for fear to kick in. That’s how you turn a tad more pragmatic in dealing with your ideals... This also leads to better defining your goals, starting from what you know that could realistically be achieved, rather than what you wish for.

For instance, I fear that the SDGs not only that will replicate the pitfalls of the MDGs, but judging by the scale of their ambition, will multiply and diversify them. The SDGs, in my opinion, propose a too idealistic vision on the true potential for positive change of our increasingly unpredictable geopolitical reality. Think only of the unforeseen events that happened in the past 6 months around the world, many of them with long-term social and economic consequences that were not factored into the grand development scheme of the SDGs. In our interconnected world, where the shockwaves of conflicts and instability spread like wildfire, it is simply unrealistic to set minute targets without considering the specificities of each country or region in which those particular targets are expected to be implemented.

In the current collection of goals and targets, a sort of MDGs v2.1 (promising more bug-fixes while claiming dramatically more resources from an aging computer), I’m afraid that many of the world’s intractable development problems are not addressed. And they could not possibly be addressed, considering that, at the end of the day, like any other

document negotiated and adopted by states with different and oftentimes diverging agendas, it is an intensely politicized material. It is the lowest common denominator that could have been agreed by 193 negotiators, each with his own agenda.

Just to zoom out a little bit to get some perspective: the SDGs not only that aim to put an end to global poverty and deal with environmental crisis while ensuring universal respect for human rights, but they intend to do all that everywhere by 2030!

Now, let's take a closer look at our reasons to worry – I wouldn't recommend using "fear" at this point, as it would be a bit premature. However, let's see:

- Same as the MDGs, the SDGs include goals and targets for which there are no reliable data available, nor could they be available in the foreseeable future. For example, target 2.5 tells us that by 2020 the world should "maintain genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants, farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species (...) at national, regional and international levels (...)". As far as I know, there are no quantitative indicators against which the development actors (individual states or international agencies) can be judged on this target.

- The SDGs recycle indicators that were known to be deeply flawed from the MDGs' evaluation experience. For example, the global poverty eradication target continues to be \$1.25, at the same old 2005 PPP level. I guess nothing better could be agreed upon...

- The SDGs keep the same arbitrary way of deciding on the desirable rate of progress. For example, under Goal 3, maternal mortality is to be cut to 70 per 100,000 births, and child mortality is to be eliminated altogether, same as AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, while hepatitis, water borne diseases and other communicable diseases are to be just

“combated”. Premature mortality from non-communicable diseases is to be cut by 1/3, while road accidents are to be cut by 1/2. Who came up with these numbers and on what criteria? Was there a serious assessment regarding the attainability of these targets within the next 15 years? And come on, how will we exterminate all African malaria-carrying mosquitoes by 2030 without using chemical insecticides? Or maybe mosquitoes-nets will prove more effective than ever before, or perhaps some miraculous vaccine is in the pipeline to be patented and I don’t know about it.

– Other SDGs are just too simplistic and naïve to be taken seriously by any experienced development practitioner. For example, target 1.4 of the poverty eradication goal includes, no more and no less than a “guarantee” that everyone should have access to microfinance, despite the fact that the best available evidence suggests that microfinance did not prove to be the effective tool for combating poverty as it was originally advertised. Goal number 4, on education, refers to life-long learning opportunities for all. Again, as any expert on education from UNICEF knows all too well, while this is a desirable goal, it is hardly one that should be prioritized over more immediate gaps to be filled, such as: increasing the number of professional educators; reducing the number of students per educator; increasing access to schools in order to improve attendance; design new and more competitive curricula; or to increase family income as to allow for the parents to keep their children in school.

And these are just a few examples that I quickly picked them from the notes I made when preparing an op-ed on the topic of the SDGs.

However, if we are to judge by what happened with the MDGs, we can expect fifteen years of high-level pleads for “more political commitment”, for “pledging more resources” towards an unprecedented success that would only be missed if the largest contributors will not gradually scale up their

financial contributions while the recipients will have to “increase their political commitments” (please read: “make more imaginative promises of reform and democratization”, in most cases).

I also expect no change in the optimistic way in which we will be presented the progress towards the achievement of the goals and targets – optimistic enough, but not too much, as to discourage increased amounts of financial support from generous donors. We should never forget that the international agencies, the ones holding the monopoly over what reaches the public eye, are funded and controlled by governments. What does that mean? Well, it means that those who are in power in those governments or governing structures will never be willing to look as if they failed in such an honorable endeavor. They will want to project success and their mandates to be associated with some achievements on such a global scale.

I’m sorry, but after living amidst real people in the developing world and getting to know, first hand, their real problems, beyond any convenient rhetoric for the eyes or ears of the general public, I can’t show a better brand of optimism. But again, this is just me and nothing should be taken face value. That is exactly why I’m encouraging all those interested in real-life development, to go on the ground, to engage in real fieldwork and experience reality for themselves, through the filter of their own principles and ideals. Development and human rights simply cannot be done from classrooms and textbooks, from conference halls or from 5 stars hotels. Development should happen on the ground, not on paper, in charts or in power point presentations.

However, regardless of what may or may not happen, the SDGs, same as the MDGs, are somehow like an experimental vaccine: they may work, or they may not, but no harm can be done by trying.

Alexandra: *Together for development* is an organization that seems very close to the principle of subsidiarity, setting goals at the most appropriate level in the communities where you carry on your projects.

Who are the communities you work with?

Could you tell us more about the current/ future projects you work on at Together?



Alexandru Ciorobea: Currently, we work in Cameroon with 2 different communities. One is a community of fishermen in Kribi, right on the Atlantic coast, where we have set up a sustainable commercial fishery and a fish-distribution operation, while the other is

located deep into a remote area from the central region. The latter is an agrarian community that due to its geographic isolation and lack of access to most resources had to diversify and develop by itself. What made us interested in them was their proven capacity to work together and thrive despite unimaginable adversities and without absolutely any help from the local authorities. This second project is much larger in scale and more diversified than the fishery. If successful, we will prove that the development model proposed by *Together* can be implemented and generate results even in the most remote and geographically challenged communities.

The third project in Cameroon is focused on the empowerment of women. Essentially, we plan to develop an all-women cooperative that is harvesting and processing a traditional local plant called *Allanblackia Floribunda*. Most of these women were victims of various forms of abuses and were outcast by their conservative communities of origin. Their only chance for a better and dignified life is to develop their own income

generating activity. So, in a nutshell, *Together* intends to provide these women with all the necessary technology that would enable them to increase their productivity, the quality of their products and to expand their presence on the local markets.

However, the dearest and closest to my heart is the project that we have developed in Romania, as the pilot project of *Together*, back in the spring of 2013, when we were trying to test the concept in the real world. There we developed a fully organic and carbon neutral



bee-farm. The project is now in its last year of development. That means that according to our agreement, our collaboration with them will end in May 2016. At that point, according to the financial indicators, the project will be self-sustainable and set on a growing trend. You can find more about it from our website and also anyone interested can order honey, pollen and a wide range of apicultural byproducts directly from their website: www.mellydor.ro.

In perspective, once the bee-farm project will be over next year, we intend to start another project in Romania, most probably in the field of social responsibility and civic education focused on young people from disadvantaged communities.

Alexandra: The name of your organization – *Together for development* – seems to catch the idea of #SDG17 (Partnership for the Goals). Is the idea of partnership for development sufficiently shared amongst decision makers, CS workers and final beneficiaries (i.e. communities in need)?



Alexandru Ciorobea: As I was excessively long on all my other answers I will be brief on this one. About decision makers, the problem is not that they wouldn't be aware of what needs to be done. At that level, the problem is a bit more cynical than that. It's all about political benefits. If a certain

project presents immediate political or image capital, then it is likely that it will draw the necessary attention and maybe the support of the "decision makers", otherwise it's either shelved or left for the idealist activists... With the CS workers, honestly I didn't have enough contacts as to form an opinion one way or another.

However, at the level of the beneficiaries, there can be a real challenge. The idea of "partnership" and mutual obligations, of deadlines and quantitative targets is initially difficult to grasp. It takes time, patience and perseverance to create the premises for developing a project that would stand a decent chance to come out on the green after the first year... This is not only applicable in countries where one would expect that cultural differences may be the main impediments, but also closer to home.

Believe me, it took us some many long, unsuccessful hours to try to explain to some communities in Romania that the modern cooperatives that proved successful in many other EU countries – especially from Central Europe, such as Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria or Poland – have nothing to do with the cooperatives from the communist time. We were met with a high level of reticence and we came to understand that some people simply cannot grasp how someone would just wish to help them develop their own businesses without giving them money but just means of production and counseling. Moreover, very few of

them seemed to understand and to be willing to accept the rigors of a business-plan, with clear deadlines and assessable growth and productivity targets. Well, the problems are more complex on this department and this could easily make the topic of a different conversation some other time.

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With a very rich academic background (holding a BA degree in Management and Administrative Studies from Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies (Romania), an MA degree in Anglophone Studies from Metropolitan University (Czech Republic) and being a graduate of George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, (Germany), **Alexandru Ciorobea** became a career diplomat with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Romania (2004-2012).

Posted in NYC with the [Permanent Mission of Romania to the United Nations](#), between 2007-2012 he negotiated, on behalf of the European Union, several [General Assembly](#) resolutions on Human Rights and development. His main fields of expertise are Human Rights, humanitarian affairs, social and economic development. In December 2012, after he left the MFA, he established [Together for Development](#) in Washington D.C., which is an American non-profit organization aiming to promote a new model of implementing economic and social development projects.

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The views expressed in this article are solely the property of their author and do not represent under any circumstances the

official position of any international organization.

Fresh perspectives from the European Commission with Ms Angela Filote

We are interviewing Ms Angela Filote, the Head of the [European Commission Representation in Romania](#). In the context of the [European Year for Development](#) (EYD2015), our discussion is touching upon the role of the EU as the biggest development donor in the world and Romania's profile as a new donor in the field of international cooperation.

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Alexandra: A [special survey dedicated to the #EYD2015](#) has been carried out at the end of 2014 in all the 28 Member States of the European Union. At a European level, 85% of the citizens consider that helping people in developing countries is extremely important and should be a priority for the EU (64%).

However, more than half of the Europeans (55%) do not know where the EU aid for development goes and lack knowledge on the way the EU operates in partner countries where development work is conducted.

Having a look at the way Romanians answered, we discovered that 55% of the population does not know where the Romanian ODA goes; nevertheless, almost the same percent of respondents (54%) consider that tackling poverty in developing countries should be a priority for the national government. About 70% agree that tackling poverty in developing countries is a moral

duty of the European Union.

Now when the EYD is about to end, how would you describe its legacy in terms of enhancing knowledge and spreading good practices in the field of international cooperation across the EU and more specifically in Romania?

Ms Filote: Going into this campaign, we always knew that 2015 would be a key international year for enhancing knowledge with a follow-up framework to the recently approved Sustainable Development Goals, this December's Climate Change Conference in Paris and the ongoing financial and now refugee crisis. The timing of 2015 for the European Year for Development (EYD2015) was therefore crucial as it created a unique communication platform and momentum to raise awareness and bring global issues such as climate change, natural and man-made disasters, trade, migration, radical extremism, outbreaks of epidemics and security issues closer to EU citizens.

An effective EYD2015 communication campaign was needed to show and involve EU citizens in the reality of international cooperation. Thanks to a decentralised, innovative and engaging approach with an emphasis on the young (15-24), the EYD2015 has brought about widespread support from our partners and a new and better way to communicate the narrative on international cooperation's current and future global challenges affecting our everyday lives via co-owned social media channels, [an interactive website](#) and a [thematic campaign toolkit](#) in all languages.

Like the majority of the Europe's Member States, Romania has contributed to the year's legacy and ran a very ambitious campaign for the year through music and art festivals, youth exhibitions and EYD Days on 19-20 September as part of our broader campaign taking place across 17 European Member States. The EYD Days involved youth volunteers, local NGOs, the private sector and national media targeting the broader public.

Alexandra: 2015 is the European Year for Development. However, if we had dedicated a thematic topic to be celebrated by the entire world this year, 2015 would have been *the Global Year for Development*. What are your hopes and your doubts about the new post-2015 agenda and how does it influence the EU's role as the biggest development donor in the world?

Ms Filote: The Millennium Development Goals have guided EU development policy for 15 years and the EU has made the biggest contribution – the EU and its Member States are collectively the world's largest donor by far, providing €58 billion in 2014.

However, progress has been unequal around the world, and there remains unfinished business as we reach the MDGs 2015 deadline. Furthermore, the world is a very different place to what it was in 2000 when the MDGs were put in place, with new challenges that call for global and integrated solutions across a wide range of policies. The new set of Sustainable Development Goals reflects that. The EU is determined to fully implement [the 2030 Agenda](#), across the range of its internal and external policies. In doing so, the EU remains committed to global solidarity and will support the countries most in need.

Alexandra: We are going to slightly change the topic and discuss the fact that since 2007, Romania's role in development cooperation has changed. From a beneficiary country, it has become [a donor of official development assistance \(ODA\)](#). While providing [ODA](#) through multilateral channels (i.e. [UN agencies](#), [EU](#), OSCE, etc) might give us less visibility in the field, bilateral assistance is perceived as a very efficient way of exporting our transition experience. What are Romania's comparative advantages as a donor and how can it enhance its role in the development cooperation, from your perspective?

Ms Filote: The transition experience of Romania is definitely

a valuable asset for its development policy. Its comparative advantage consists in the multitude of development and transition similarities with the partner countries we try to engage with at the moment. The fact that Romania succeeded in achieving important results during the transition process towards democracy and an open economy might benefit to our partners in development. Moreover, Romania's knowledge of the economic, political and social context of the Eastern neighbourhood and the South Caucasus region should give us a leading role in promoting the European agenda and several development projects and programmes.

Since its integration in the EU in 2007, Romania has provided bilateral development assistance (i.e. country-to-country) and has also joined the European Commission's efforts in the field. Currently, from a geographic perspective, Romania's focus is on 12 countries: in the Black Sea extended region (Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) and in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region: Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Irak, Palestine and Afghanistan. Amongst its thematic priorities, we should mention i) the transition to democracy, good governance, support for the Civil Society, ii) the support to agriculture and economic growth, iii) the environment protection and the promotion of the renewable energy sources in the Climate Change context.

Last, but not least, I would also add the fact that recently Romania made significant progress in increasing its aid transparency. In July 2015, Romania became the first country from those that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 to publish data related to its development cooperation activities according to the [International Aid Transparency Initiative](#) (IATI) requirements.



With over 20 years of experience in institutional communication management, **Ms Angela Filote** worked in Romania, Turkey and Egypt, and in 2010, she started to work at the European Commission in Brussels as one of the spokespersons responsible

for the EU Enlargement and the Neighbourhood Policy. One year later, Ms Filote joined the [Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development](#) as the Head of the Communication Department in charge, amongst others with the information campaign on the EU-wide Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In January 2014, she became the Head of the [European Commission Representation in Romania](#).

Ms Filote studied economics, political science and European affairs. She holds a Master's Degree in Philosophy, with a Major in International Relations from VU University of Amsterdam.