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Leadership | Diplomacy 4.0: Tackling global challenges through the Global Diplomacy Lab



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[ElsaMarie DSilva](#)

This piece is part of a series on Leadership by members of WCAPS — Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security & Conflict Transformation — and other members of the broader ISD community.



A globe hangs in an exhibition space. (Image: [Romain Tordo](#) on [Unsplash](#))

“It takes a lot of courage to fight biases and oppressive regimes, but it takes even greater courage to admit ignorance and venture into the unknown.” — Yuval Noah Harari, author and historian

The challenges of the 21st century are very different from the ones of previous centuries. We are battling climate change, technological disruptions, and growing economic inequality, amongst others. These challenges require radical collaboration to spur innovative thinking and creativity. Further, the nature of diplomacy is evolving. It is no longer the strict purview of national governments and international organizations.

In an effort to bring new perspectives to tackle these challenges, a little over five years ago the German Federal Foreign Office brought together traditional and non-traditional diplomats from different networks, such as the [BMW Foundation](#) [Herbert Quandt](#), the [German-American Fulbright Commission](#), the [Global Leadership Academy](#), the [Stiftung Mercator](#) and the [Robert Bosch Stiftung](#).

Thus began the Global Diplomacy Lab (GDL), a platform for exploring a new and more inclusive diplomacy that goes beyond traditional politics. The aim was to empower a diverse group of professionals to explore new tools of communication on the basis of mutual trust and to re-formulate an agenda for collective action. The GDL has formulated a new strategy — Diplomacy 4.0 — which brings together all stakeholders to participate and be heard. Its core approach is to link global and local opportunities and challenges through the various member-driven GDL events.

By bringing together experts from a wide range of sectors and disciplines, GDL taps into their knowledge and skills to form creative and interdisciplinary communities that could function as a global taskforce on standby. To enable all relevant actors to engage in this new form of multi-stakeholder and cross-domain cooperation, GDL uses a lab model to experiment, and to find out what works and what doesn't — to build upon the capacities of actors (individuals and organizations) to engage in this new diplomacy. Every lab works with a local partner, known as the challenge holder, who presents a problem that the participants of the lab work on to provide solutions and perspectives.

In 2015, when Germany was expecting 1 million refugees to arrive from Syria and elsewhere, policy makers were overwhelmed. In response, the GDL hosted a lab to address migration issues. They used the Open Situation Room format, a creative problem-solving approach to arrive at new perspectives and new possible solutions. The idea of the Open Situation Room builds on the political “Situation Room,” where crisis management teams of one government convene to give advice for urgent foreign policy issues. The Open Situation Room expands this idea by adding a more diverse selection of participants and a creative problem-solving approach to arrive at new perspectives and new possible solutions.

Using design thinking, they were able to develop “what if” scenarios and overcome personal and professional boundaries of siloed thinking. Some suggestions included setting up a Turkish German Migration centre for better cultural and historical understanding; developing a website for culturally sensitive teaching in host countries; developing a MigrAPP for refugees; a portable media centre for refugees; a new narrative of storytelling called “It works” to enable better integration; and mapping data on cost benefits of migration.

I participated in the 2017 lab in Argentina, where the challenge holder was the ESMA Memory Site Museum, whose mission was to prevent mass atrocities by

raising awareness amongst the general public. The lab sought to examine regional networks for atrocity prevention as innovative and inclusive diplomatic solutions to a global problem that is driven and informed by local demand. The lab answered this challenge by highlighting the Latin American and the African Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention specifically as tools for atrocity prevention. The lab did not, however, focus exclusively on the networks themselves, but demonstrated how they act as instruments for prevention, all the while making clear the need to expand this process to the global level. The objective of the lab was to provide examples of existing networks and their contributions to national agendas, to push forward the growth of new networks and cross-regional coordination, as well as to offer South-South cooperation between Latin America and Africa.

Currently I am the host of the Mumbai Lab, which is focused on Impact of Urban Design on Inclusive Cities: Intersections and Crossroads. The aim of the lab is for the members to help develop a framework to report the UN Sustainable Development Goals at the city level in line with the New Urban Agenda, and create a strategy for implementation. We have 18 members from 11 countries representing diverse fields of development, social justice, environment, legal, finance, politics, and more. Over a period spanning a year with online (and hopefully some in-person sessions), we hope to learn from experts, hear from stakeholders living in Mumbai, and identify key indicators in conjunction with the challenge holders who are the local municipality. As we go through this process of co-creation, we challenge assumptions, develop partnerships and friendships, and design spaces for collaboration.

As a non-traditional diplomat, I thoroughly enjoy being part of the GDL. It gives me the opportunity to participate and contribute to solving challenges that are far beyond my organization and my own mandate. It has helped me develop new perspectives, accelerate my learning by doing, and become part of a global community. I have learned new skills, tools, and knowledge which have transformed my own work in advancing gender equality and helped me push the boundaries further.

As our GDL Dean, Rupert Polenz says:

Getting out of the regular environment to such facilities also helps in being creative and innovating.

GDL has established a global ecosystem characterized by mutual accountability, respect and inclusiveness, and as a result has delivered positive transformational change.

. . .


ElsaMarie DSilva is the Founder & CEO of Red Dot Foundation based in Mumbai, India. She is a member of the Global Diplomacy Lab, an initiative of the German Federal Foreign Office. You can follow her on twitter @elsamariesilva

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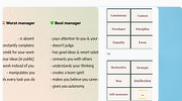
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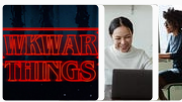


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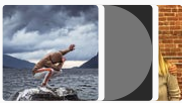
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