



‘If the herd of cows splits up, the tiger can eat them’:

Using a diversity and values framework to promote equality and social justice in Myanmar

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Introduction

SDGs: WHAT future do we want?

‘a world that is just, equitable and inclusive ...
to benefit all ... without distinction of any kind’



UN General Assembly 2014:
*Report of the Open Working Group of the
General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals*

Introduction

Four 'Race and Religion Protection Laws':

- *Population Control Law:*

Government control over reproductive rights of women in regions with high number of migrants, high population growth rate and a high birth rate

- *Myanmar Buddhist Women's Special Marriage Law:*

Local registrars to publicly post inter-religious marriage applications. If any objections are received within 14 days, a court case is required before marriage

- *Religious Conversion Law:*

Anyone who chooses to change their religion must apply to a "registration board", be interviewed, engage in religious study and wait 90 days

- *Monogamy Law:*

Makes it a criminal offense to have more than one spouse or to live with an unmarried partner who is not a spouse

Paung Ku (The Bridge)



Even traditionally, Myanmar women have already enjoyed equal rights with men ... women are equal with the men in political, social, cultural and religious matters'

(Government of Myanmar, 2007, official CEDAW statement)

Diversity, inequality and conflict

- Five types of diversity where inequality and conflict were experienced as arising most often in Myanmar:
 - Religion
 - Ethnicity
 - Gender (intricately linked to sexuality)
 - Disability
 - Financial status (rich or poor)
- Identified strong linkages between different types of diversity; e.g.,
 - All religious systems preference traditionally masculine men over women, and also over men who are less traditionally masculine

Identifying values

- All workshop participants valued:

Peace, freedom, equality, and social justice

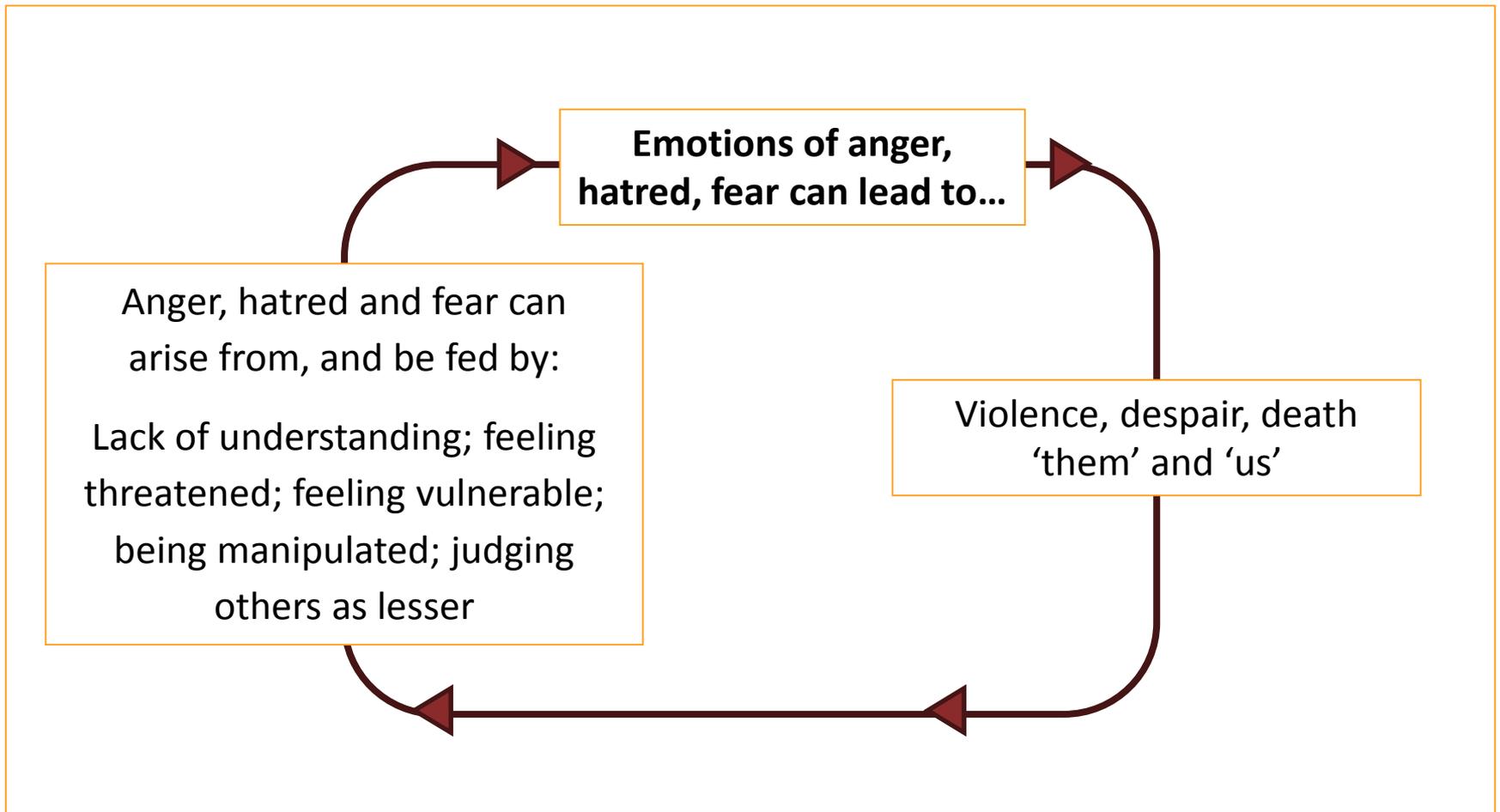
Remember the SDGs' vision?

'a world that is just, equitable and inclusive ...
to benefit all ... without distinction of any kind'

- These are *not* values that can be applied selectively



The role of emotions



When diversity is replaced with 'them' and 'us'

'In the beginning, I hated Muslims. I saw a video of Muslims attacking Buddhists in Rakhine and it made me crazy. Then I realised that the violence was manipulated by those who stood to gain from stirring up hatred.

... Now I realise that I have ... to look inside myself and try to avoid anger, hatred and fear.'

Fear of shame linked to gender & sexuality

- Great deal of shared reflection; one (deeply Buddhist) village leader concluded:

‘In our village, when young women wear short skirts or trousers many people say “it’s against our religious tradition” and think the women are immoral.

But actually, Buddha never said anything about what women wear. It’s people who do that, so they can try and control the young women’

- 2 workshops do not a changed society make
- Pressures of work, everyday commitments, imprisonment can get in the way of doing things differently
- Civil society participants committed to a plan of action:
 - Promoting & protecting diversity in election period
 - Challenging hate campaigns
 - Identifying intersections of inequality
 - Challenging their own unconscious judgments ...
- Paung Ku developed Diversity Guidelines to help other CSOs think about these issues
- Convinced a funder to support Gender & Diversity work

Thank you

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