

Vikalp Sangam – Social Wellbeing and Justice

January 15-18, 2026, Fireflies Intercultural Centre (Bengaluru)



Introduction

This report documents the four-day **Vikalp Sangam on Social Wellbeing and Justice** held at **Fireflies Intercultural Centre, Bengaluru, from January 15–18, 2026**. The gathering brought together practitioners, activists, educators, and organisers to explore alternative frameworks of wellbeing rooted in justice, inclusion, ecological balance, and lived experience. The report captures key sessions, activities, reflections, and emergent learnings.

For the detailed workshop schedule, including session titles and facilitators, please refer to link [☰ Social Wellbeing and Justice Jan 15-18 2026 : Schedule](#) . A brief thematic overview of each day is provided below.

Day 1: Arrival, Grounding, and Framing (4.30 - 6PM)

The first day focused on arrival, relationship-building, and setting the conceptual and ethical frame for the Sangam. Sessions were designed to ground participants in shared intentions, establish norms of care and trust, and situate the conversations within broader questions of social wellbeing and justice.

Day 2: Wellbeing, Gender, Identity, and Justice

Day two examined wellbeing as a deeply social and political construct, shaped by gender, identity, caste, sexuality, disability, and lived experience. Through facilitated discussions and experiential methods, participants explored how marginalisation affects both individual and collective wellbeing.

Day 3: Peace, Justice, and Systemic Harm

The third day engaged with questions of peace and justice in the context of structural violence and systemic inequities. Sessions highlighted how economic systems, governance structures, and historical injustices shape everyday realities, with particular attention to intergenerational impacts and community resilience.

Day 4: Integration, Creativity, and Closure (9-11.00AM)

The final day focused on integration and reflection. Creative and participatory processes supported participants in synthesising insights from

the Sangam, articulating personal and collective learnings, and identifying pathways for continued engagement beyond the gathering.

15th January, 2026

Welcome address and introduction

Milind Wani from **Kalpavriksh** welcomed and thanked everyone for attending. He noted that apart from only one participant who dropped out, everyone who registered had come. Milind then invited participants to a moment of meditation which he guided. Participants were guided through breathwork to ground themselves. They were also invited to imagine being held and supported by roots that not only went deep but which also went sideways and connected with other participants forming a strong community of rootedness. This was a reminder of our connection with the various communities that we belong to. This was immediately followed by 'Zen Counting'. This was facilitated by Urmi Chanda from **Seeds of Peace**. The team was to say the numbers 1 - 25, but only one person could talk at a time; if two people spoke at once, the group had to start over. After several attempts we managed to count up to 15 without a break. The idea behind this game was for the participants to intuitively collaborate and coordinate. The Organizing team members introduced themselves. Participants waited first to get a brief introduction of the Vikalp Sangam before they could introduce themselves.

This activity set the tone for the Sangam, emphasizing presence, collective awareness, and non-verbal coordination—skills essential for community-based justice work.



After the opening session Milind made a presentation to etch out the highlights of the following points of the Vikalp Sangam Process

About Vikalp Sangam

Vikalp Sangam, or the Confluence of Alternatives, is a unique initiative to explore and understand alternative thinking and organizing on a large spectrum of economic, social and environmental issues in India. The chief aim is to create a platform where alternatives that don't rely on ecological self-destruction and the bitter calcification of economic inequality, reach a large audience and become viable for discussion, analysis and eventual replication in other places.



‘Vikalp Sangam’ (VS) is Hindi for ‘Alternatives Confluence’.

[Vikalp Sangam is an evolving process](#) that involves in its core functioning, over 90 movements and organisations in India.

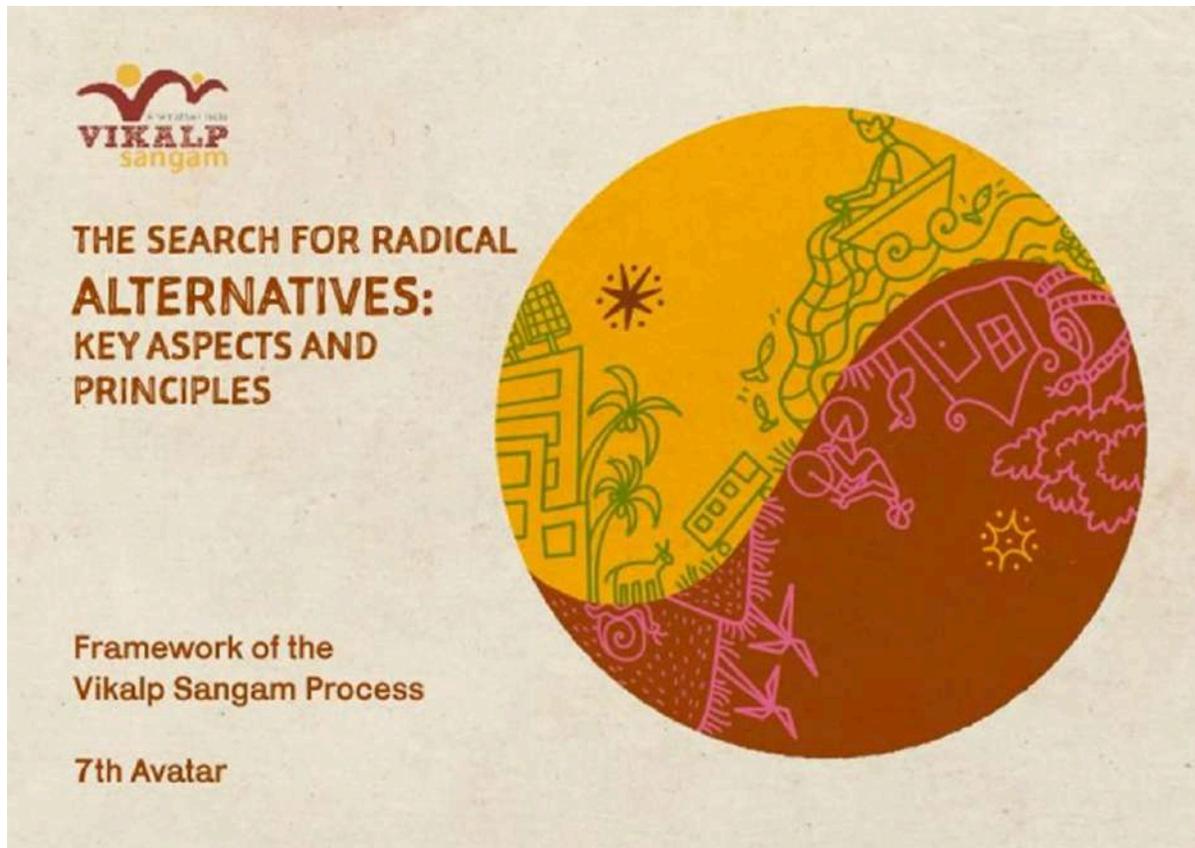
The VS process started in 2014, emerging out of a search for grounded alternatives to the current model of ‘development’ that is built on ecological destruction and rising inequalities. Watch the [launch](#) of Vikalp Sangam and also watch the [Vikalp Sangam video](#).

‘Alternatives’ refers to ways of meeting human needs and aspirations, without trashing the earth and without leaving half of humanity behind. These refer to grassroots initiatives for basic needs, processes of direct political and economic democracy, struggles for justice and equality, policies, technologies and concepts/frameworks that challenge structures of oppression, inequality and unsustainability. They could be initiated and implemented by communities, government, civil society organisations and individuals amongst others.

The VS process includes documentation of alternative initiatives across India, outreach with various kinds of people including youth, physical and online gatherings, and other forms of networking. It is a confluence where people share, collaborate, and reflect on their experiences and knowledge. This enables shared peer learning and envisioning of a just and ecologically conscious society. Additionally, the Sangam groups engage in collective advocacy for policy and systemic transformations.

Undertakings On Alternatives

[The Search for Radical Alternatives: Key Aspects and Principles](#) is an evolving document currently in its 7th Avatar also referred to as the Alternatives Framework note. Its printed booklet [Vikalp Sangam: The Search for Alternatives](#) is also available. The Framework Note has been translated into [Malayalam](#) and [Hindi](#).



Vikalp Sangam Website

This website is a collection of stories, case studies, resources, opinion pieces, and videos on alternative initiatives.

If you want to share or submit an article or have other ideas for collaboration, email us at info@vikalpsangam.org with the subject line "Contribute a story".

Physical Sangams

Sangams are physical gatherings of organizations, individuals, networks and movements who have worked on ground at practical or conceptual levels on alternatives. During these gatherings, there is a lot of sharing of experiences, perspectives, dialogues, and collective visioning.

These are organised either regionally (State, district or eco-regional level) or thematically (e.g. energy, food, health, democracy). As of late 2021, 22 Sangams have been held.

You can access all the Sangam reports on the website.

Vikalp Vartas

Vikalp Varta is a series of online dialogues created with the aim of being a co-learning space where different alternatives share their work, efforts, challenges and successes.

Other Key Initiatives

Vikalp Sutra: Vikalp Sutra has emerged from Vikalp Sangam, and aims at linking other networks and collectives with a focus on the sustainable livelihoods' landscape of India.

Alternative Economies Vikalp Sangam: A growing community of researchers and experimenters from across India exploring meaningful ways of weaning off from the modern economic paradigm while creating transformative, life-affirming ways of relating to our material world and resources.

Youth Vikalp Sangam: A process to engage diverse youth in developing a common understanding of the principles and values of true transformation and help them in co-dreaming of alternative ways of living.

Western Himalaya Vikalp Sangam: Bringing together people working on or interested in alternatives, ideologically and in practice in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu & Kashmir.

South Asia Bioregionalism Working Group: A voluntary network of members rei-magining an eco-regional and bioregional governance for South Asia.

Vikalp Sangam has also helped initiate a global platform with similar aims, of providing a bridge for radical alternative movements across the world, the **Global Tapestry of Alternatives**.

Participants introduction

Everyone was asked to introduce themselves through name, where they are from, what they do and speak of one thing that brings them joy. This session brought to a close the 1st day of the workshop.



16th January, 2026

Recap of day 1 / afternoon session

The first full day of the workshop started with a brief recap of the previous day. One of the facilitators urged participants to express themselves if anything was not sitting well with them. She further explained that none of the facilitators were 'experts' and that we all depended on the wisdom of the group.

Setting the framework: What does Wellbeing mean

Below is a summary of the presentation made by Milind. Refer to full presentation [Social Wellbeing and Justice](#).

Milind started by saying that any idea of wellbeing needs to consider all other aspects of life - social, political, economic, cultural, psychological and spiritual.

Individual wellbeing cannot be divorced from community wellbeing.

The idea of Wellbeing means different things to different people. For some it could refer to physical health, for others emotional or even spiritual. Some think of it in only individual terms while others point to its socio-economic, political, cultural and economic dimensions. The vocabulary associated with the idea of wellbeing can include terms like peace, freedom, climate, justice, meaning and hope.

Some speak of the state of harmony between the individual and society. Some draw attention to our relationship with nature - thus going beyond the human to include more-than-human; while others define it from the perspective of what it is NOT; where to understand wellbeing is to have known ill-being as experienced in the existential anxieties we suffer from because of our alienation from self/others/nature.

What are the root causes - systemic, social pathologies, structures, etc - behind illbeing? What are the modalities to achieving wellbeing at the individual and social level? These are important questions. The answer to the former can include spirituality/therapy/mediation/nature walks etc. while the latter can include considerations of ecology, peace, absence of conflicts,policies etc. or even radical systemic transformation. Milind also underlined the fact that social wellbeing without justice cannot be imagined. What are the modalities to achieving wellbeing at the individual and social level? He also touched upon various thinkers, philosophies and ideologies that have tried to understand the idea of wellbeing and justice.

These were some of the important questions and ideas that the presentation posed. This session provided an introductory framework of reference that can hopefully inform the reflections and discussions over the next two days.

Plenary discussions

The presentation evoked questions such as the contradiction between religion and some of the ideologies. It was agreed that disagreements exist even among the proponents of these ideologies. It was also felt that the sources could have been more inclusive, for e.g. feminist/or LGBTQ perspectives need to be included while discussing Social Wellbeing and Justice. It was acknowledged that there is no one manual that can be used to reach wellbeing, thus, we need to borrow from various thinkers to understand and address the issues. Others opined that time was gone when religions 'othered' others. What appeals to me as an individual? Can I be authentic to be that? Can I follow that without anyone imposing certain dialogues and philosophies? Individuals experience conflict between wanting to be accepted and being authentic. There should be a framework as a reference but also remember that certain people operate outside these frameworks. For e.g. how do different frameworks understand Wellbeing in terms of how joy is expressed?

Across the discussion, participants repeatedly returned to the tension between belonging and authenticity, structure and freedom, and individual joy versus collective responsibility. There was a shared recognition that wellbeing cannot be standardized, yet justice requires some common ethical grounding.

Understanding Gender and Sexuality Diversity for Social Well-Being (by Delfina, Naveen, Joycia, Priscilla)

The session sought to explore the issues of gender, sexuality from the lens of wellbeing and justice . But first, the participants engaged in a few activities related to the themes.

A society's well-being is fundamentally tied to how it treats its most marginalised members. Understanding gender and sexuality diversity is essential to building communities grounded in dignity, justice, and shared humanity. When people across the spectrum of identities—women, men, transgender, non-binary, intersex, lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, queer, and more—are able to express themselves freely and safely, they are better positioned to contribute socially, economically, and culturally. This not only strengthens individual well-being but also enriches the collective health of society. Crucial to this understanding is an intersectional approach. Identities never exist in isolation; gender, sexuality, caste, race, class, disability, religion, and socioeconomic location interact in complex ways. An intersectional lens helps us recognise that experiences of discrimination or privilege differ significantly across contexts.

Feminism has been a driving force in creating the conditions necessary for broad-based equality. Rooted in the struggle against patriarchy and gender-based oppression, feminism argues that all genders deserve equal rights, opportunities, and respect. Importantly, contemporary feminist movements emphasise intersectionality, expanding the struggle beyond women's rights alone to include transgender rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and the dismantling of all systems that restrict human freedom. Feminism's commitment to equality is therefore central to social well-being: societies that uphold gender justice consistently show stronger social cohesion, better public health outcomes, and more resilient institutions.

The fight for equality also resonates with other historic movements for human rights. Nelson Mandela's struggle against apartheid demonstrated how transformative it is when societies confront deeply entrenched systems of discrimination. Mandela reminded the world that true freedom is indivisible—no one is free until everyone is free. Similarly, the principles underlying Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of justice, love, and moral courage continue to inspire global movements today. His insistence on non-violent resistance and the inherent dignity of every human being offers a moral foundation for contemporary struggles, including those for gender and sexuality rights. These movements show that challenging inequality in one domain strengthens justice everywhere.

In this spirit, LGBTQ+ rights must be recognised as fundamental human rights. As Hillary Clinton powerfully declared at the United Nations in 2011, "gay rights are human

rights, and human rights are gay rights.” This statement underscores a simple truth: equal rights for LGBTQ+ people are not optional; they are the baseline for any society that claims to value justice.

Understanding gender and sexuality diversity—through an intersectional, feminist, and human-rights lens—is not a specialised academic exercise. It is a social necessity. By affirming the dignity of every person and learning from historic struggles for justice, societies move closer to true social well-being: communities where every individual can live freely, safely, and authentically.

Spirituality is one of the basic human longings for meaning, purpose, and connection. In simple words it helps us to understand our existence like who we are and why our lives matter. Spirituality shapes our inner life. Values take root there. Dignity gets affirmed, and experiences like joy, pain, love, and hope gain depth. It helps us to understand human beings are whole mind, body, and spirit and what affects one aspect impacts the whole person.

For this reason, discrimination and shame reach deeper than social status. It destroys one’s sense of worth and belonging. Social well-being grows when we understand and recognize this, and protect the inner dignity of a person. This then helps in nurturing, healing, and creating spaces of resilience and wholeness both for the individual and the society.

Activity 1

Various hypothetical situations were mentioned and participants asked to express their feelings without the use of words: situations included some typical gender situations; for e.g. a child coming out as gay, receiving an invitation to a gay marriage.

While all participants had a chance to introduce themselves once, there were still many participants who did not know each other's names. Naveen facilitated an introductory activity where all participants stood in a circle, each participant was asked to say their name, with an adjective of their choice, and using action and voice, while others copied. This was followed by a round of sharing of the current feeling, again using action and voice, but no words. Then participants were requested to walk randomly and stop and respond to the situation given to them - this included general situations like getting a promotion or missing your vehicle key while going out for important work. However, that was followed by situations

that were directly related to gender and sexuality, for example, the experience of being bullied in school, the experience of watching a group of men harass a woman on a bus, a friend coming out as gay, etc. When the situation was given, the participants were requested to remain wherever they are and express themselves as they would in that situation without worrying about others in the room.

Activity 2

Onions & potatoes :

Joycia led an activity to explore the idea of fairness and gender justice. A bunch of potatoes and onions were placed in the middle of the room. In the first round, each participant was requested to pick up one object and go back. Then they were asked to return the objects. In the next round, they were asked to grab as many as they wished, which led to chaos. While, one participant tried to take the entire plate and some hoarded the objects, another participant tried to redistribute some of what they got. One person said they waited for the things to come to them and it did. Participants shared their experiences. This led to a facilitated discussion about gender justice and social wellbeing.

Activity 3

Delfina facilitated a discussion about gender roles by inviting one of the participants to share a story and another to re-share the same story inverting the gender roles. A second story was also shared with a romantic aspect, but the gender of one of the characters was switched in the subsequent sharing making it in effect a romantic story of two persons of the same gender. Some of the ideas that came up for discussion include what are the challenges faced by girls and women not faced by others and how to address them, how pervasive gender roles and stereotypes are in all aspects of social life and how to break them, the normative ideas of love and possibilities of alternatives.

Activity 4

Devanshi facilitated a process of reflection in which music was played and participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences and learning.

Key reflections from the activity included:

- People who perceive themselves as vulnerable often opt out before competition begins.
- In the absence of rules, power and entitlement surface quickly.
- Acts of redistribution emerge not automatically, but through conscious intervention.
- Individual wellbeing cannot be sustained in isolation from collective wellbeing.

In the context of discussion after this activity, the idea of HOPE got discussed. One participant poetically described Hope as having 2 beautiful daughters - one called anger and the other courage.

Finally Delfina asked participants to share some common simple stories based on their own experience:

Story 1 by Bhagavi: Boy with many friends, goes to study because he was forced to do engineering, gets a job, gets married, did higher studies, did further studies, married, gets more money, lived well and died at 70.

Participants were invited to retell the story, without changing any facts but this time replacing the boy with a girl. When the story changed, it was very clear that when the story flipped, some of it was not plausible for a girl.

Story 2: by Anna was about romance between a boy and girl of different religions. Though religions were different, the couple were able to get married (despite belonging to different religions) and had children even though sadly the children died. When the story was reimagined as being of queer couple, it was clear that the objection was not about religion but about same sex.

Lesson: in sharing stories about the things we have experienced in life either ourselves or those close to us, do we have to fit in either/ or binary categories or do we fit into a more inclusive AND category?

The activities had helped participants to embody their bodies during various situations; experience sharing of resources in situations where rules are clear or in situations when there are no clear rules, and finally the last activity where they were confronted with their ability to sit with discomfort. Participants agreed that

we do not have to understand everything – related to gender, sexual, minority groups and how to deal with them. But how do we understand wellbeing, spirituality in this context when we connect these with groups like people with disability, autism? How do we define some as normal and not others – What does spirituality do? How does spirituality deal with binaries? How about separation between you / me?, men and women?

Plenary session

Someone sought to know how to ask questions to the LGBTQ+ without being offensive? One person felt that we should think about how best we can be sensitive; for example, certain personal questions should not be asked either to anyone regardless of their orientation; On the other hand, another response was that questions can be spontaneous and sincere. We live with each other. There are curiosities but we should look at context, realities and relationships. Remember that pain and intolerance exists in some people.

Movie screening: Thamayu Aada/Alkae Aattaa - a Beta Kuruba Documentary ▶ **Thamayu Aada | Alkae Aattaa Artform | Betta Kuruba Documentary | Kabini | Karn...**

Thamayu Aada is a documentary about the Betta Kurubas of Hunasekuppe, an indigenous community bringing their ancestral dance back to life. A story of cultural revival, resilience, and the bonds that hold a community together. Like many Adivasi communities, they've faced displacement and the gradual erosion of their cultural practices.

Alkae Aata, their traditional dance form, had nearly been forgotten. This documentary is a small attempt to not only help revive the dance but also to create a permanent record of this never-before-filmed art form, much like their language, which exists only in memory and practice, not in written word.

Reflections

The importance of **Wisdom of the elders** – they still have a voice in the community. The community tunes in to and connects with each other. Even the audience 'gets to 'participate'. The dance calls for the ability to anticipate each other's moves. The movie was very touching, thus, some felt that sometimes it is best to just sit with the thoughts and not analyse too much. Some felt that losing connection with nature is something scary. All agreed that there's hope in things like these film / art forms.

Storytelling on themes of well-being/ justice (Khushali) (by Utpala)

This session explored how our life stories reflect the idea and experiences of wellbeing and justice.

Utpala started with a poem by Jasinta Kerkarta. Jasinta is an acclaimed Adivasi poet. This poem is a dialogue between a mother and her daughter where the mother beautifully explains our connection with nature.

She also shared another story about the connection between a society and nature. She shared stories of Fuldei/ Fulari and Harela. Both are local festivals of Uttarakhand. Fuldei is a celebration of spring, of flowers. Children go to forest and bring different flowers (5 or 7 types). Then they put these flowers at everyone's doorstep singing a song "FULDEI CHAMMA DEI ,DENO DWAR BHARI BHAKAR, YO DELI SE BARAMBAAR NAMASKAR" (We are wishing prosperity for you. May this doorstep be forgiving for everyone). In exchange they get money, rice, jaggery and blessings. In the night children cook with whatever they get. This childlike game, or a game-like festival is a way to reconnect with neighbours, with community. Farming season is also about to start and this also needs community help. After a long spell of winter, of snow this is a start of bloom, rejuvenating nature. These festivals are also an expression of connectedness with nature, community. A joyful expression of individuality and collectivity. An easy way towards individual and social well being.

Utpala also shared her knowledge of community dependence on their ecosystem and how people evolve a way of living which is in harmony with others, with ecology. Utpala highlighted how in Ladakh there is a saying "We shouldn't tell stories till the earth is green" and how in plains of Ganga-Jamuna earlier there was a belief that deities sleep in CHAUMASA. Chaumasa is four months of rain when farming families had no time to spare for anything other than farming.

The day culminated with campus walk/discussion around sculptures and paintings on religious, social and ecological themes (by Siddhartha)

17th January, 2026

Day 3

The morning started with participants sharing a recap of the previous day. People mentioned various sessions that they liked including the campus walk in the evening led by Siddhartha.

Urmi then posed the question to the participants, ***this morning, right now, what's your internal weather ?***- responses varied from feeling fresh, excited, tired, anxious, anxiety, apprehension. The purpose of the sharing was so that colleagues could hold space for others.

“No Peace Without Justice: Exploring the Intersections of Peacebuilding and Justice Work” (by Urmi)

Urmi Chanda’s session focussed on the following objectives:

1. Understand how peace and justice are interconnected within frameworks of conflict transformation.
2. Reflect on real-world case studies that illustrate the peace-justice relationship.
3. Engage dialogically to explore how justice and peace manifest in their own contexts and work.
4. Co-create shared insights or guiding principles for integrating justice into peacebuilding efforts (and vice versa).

Urmi gave a conceptual grounding with Galtun’s Positive and Negative peace model. This was followed by discussions on two relevant socio-political events as models to understand the relationship between peace, justice and wellbeing. These are (i) South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and (ii) Northern Ireland Peace Process.

Following the above Urmi asked the participants : “ What word comes to mind when you hear the word peace? “

Following answers were forthcoming:

<i>Peace</i>	<i>Justice</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Absence of violence</i> • <i>Happen as expected</i> • <i>Silence</i> • <i>Absence of war</i> • <i>Mother Teresa</i> • <i>Nelson Mandela</i> • <i>Love</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Peace</i> • <i>Sacrifice</i> • <i>Fairness</i> • <i>Speaking out</i> • <i>Doing right</i> • <i>Equity</i> • <i>Courage</i> • <i>Rights</i>

Over the discussion that followed the participants agreed that sustainable peace requires justice and the pursuit of justice must be rooted in peace. These 2 are not mutually exclusive – both on a spectrum practical solutions fall somewhere in between, e.g. the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa where the doing of wrong was acknowledged in public and perpetrators ask for forgiveness. Both parties entered willingly, aware that they have to listen to truths that they may not agree with of the other but both sides were willing to change.

Some questions were posed, like what would a reconciliation model look like? – How far back can we go? Can we focus on where we are now and here, how do we go forward? This led to discussion in inter-generational trauma and justice. This brought in the issue of climate justice and how the global south suffers and the feeling that it's our time now? How do we dialogue with those who disagree with us?

The discussion then moved to the 2 different types of peace and 8 pillars of peace - Negative peace – absence of violence or fear of it. Positive peace – conditions that optimise living for all members. This was followed by participants forming breakout subgroups with question prompts as given below.

Group discussion and summary feedback

1. Where have you seen peace efforts fail because justice was not addressed?
2. Can justice pursuits ever undermine peace? How?
3. In your work, what would it look like to center both justice and peace simultaneously?

The plenary that followed this saw the following issues/questions being raised:

(Bharatwaj): How much has to happen at the grassroots? What is the meaning of violence – destabilized structures – look at more indigenous local ways of engaging justice, let's not overlook the small efforts that we make at smaller scale which have effects at large scale.

(Shawn): Community lacking agency to choose their peace

(Bhagavi): On a personal level, communities need to participate in the processes – we cannot generalize everything, think of animal rights, conflict resolution at our places of work.

Sometimes loss is inevitable but through a justice process and not suffering unnecessarily, people living in positive circumstances document! stories of reconciliation

See full presentation by Urmi [Peace and Justice](#)

Exploring systemic injustice and its link to physical, mental, societal and spiritual well-being: (by Aspi)

The current political, social, and cultural environment is not merely stressful, but pathological. Poverty, racism, sexism, and social inequality are not just moral issues; they are public health crises.

The high prevalence of diseases like autoimmune disorders, cancer, hypertension, diabetes, depression, and anxiety in wealthy, developed nations is not a random biological malfunction but an inevitable consequence of living in a society that systematically violates fundamental human biological and emotional needs.

How a culture with deeply ingrained structures undermine wellbeing. A very toxic culture and personal trauma. Trauma experienced by one generation can influence how genes are expressed in later generations, without changing the DNA itself. These make the next generation more susceptible. Why are we so sick? A toxic culture that places economic growth over personal well being. Aspi also talked of the 7As of healing. If sickness is a message, are we ready to listen? The culture is so toxic that people have gotten used to it. What happens to the body during trauma and what are the paths to healing? Do we see trauma as trauma as a brain injury? Depriving people of their needs, doing bad things to people causes toxic culture.

Here is a link to the full presentation. ["Social Justice and Well-Being - January 2026.pdf"](#)

Plenary

During the plenary, the following issues/questions were raised.

Can Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) be applied in such cases? If there's a possibility of changing the brain through other means, there's no harm.

If trust is broken between communities it can go very far in many generations, the economy can be rebuilt but not trust takes very long to rebuild.

In cases where a victim becomes the perpetrator, does that cycle continue? In some of the examples shared, a question was raised whether the pain felt, shared, was grieving, mourning done, or is it just passed down because the culture hasn't allowed for mourning and feeling the pain.

Movie screening by Aagam

["Nero's Guests" Documentary - Deepa Bhatia | P. Sainath - YouTube](#)

“Nero’s Guests” is a compelling documentary by Deepa Bhatia that follows veteran journalist P. Sainath’s investigation into India’s deepening agrarian crisis and the epidemic of farmer suicides, particularly in regions like Vidarbha, Maharashtra. Through on-the-ground interviews with affected families, footage of rural distress, and Sainath’s speeches and writings, the film exposes how economic inequality, flawed policies, media neglect, and corporate pressures have pushed millions of small and marginal farmers into debt and despair, while mainstream attention remains focused elsewhere. It uses the metaphor of Nero’s indifferent guests to challenge viewers to confront the human cost of structural injustice and to rethink societal and media responsibility toward rural India’s suffering.

The film reinforced earlier discussions on systemic injustice, making visible the human cost of policy decisions and societal indifference—particularly in rural and agrarian contexts. Most participants found the film very heavy and it evoked emotions.

Optional Movie screening by Madan - DDS Sangham Sisters: Empowerment for Ecological Justice [Sangam Sisters: Empowerment for Ecological Justice](#)

After the day’s session, Madan screened a movie, attendance was optional.

Sangham Sisters is a film produced in joint collaboration of DDS Community Media Trust and Roskilde University, Denmark. The film explores the relationship between ecology and democracy, with the case study of Deccan Development Society Sanghams.

This film explores interconnections between green transitions and socioeconomic and political organization, which explores alternatives and innovation beyond mainstream ideas by comparing cases in India, South Africa and Denmark. It was part of an ongoing research collaboration with PhD research student Emilia Lewartowska, who did 3 months of fieldwork at DDS.

Day 4 : Closing and final presentations by participants

As the workshop drew to a close, Milind said that even though we would be parting and saying goodbyes our hearts are enmeshed in each other’s. Today I will say goodbyes but not forever. He expressed gratitude to the participants, on behalf of the organizing team.

The participants had formed 3 breakout groups on the prior day. Each group made a presentation to sum up their understanding on the issue of social wellbeing and justice. The groups were encouraged to make a creative presentation rather than using technological aid.

The 1st group did a poem based on a true story about a village in which water tankers were delivered in a place where other members of the community could not access. One local organization did realise that resources such as water should not be accessed by all members of the community regardless of their background. The organization held several consultations and awareness raising meetings and they were able to move the location of the water tanker. Those that did not have access earlier were able to access after this intervention. You can find the poem here.[Water ways](#) .



The second group did an act that depicted human and non-human interconnectedness. They performed a flock dance - a contemporary dance where the person at the front leads and the others follow. The dance was preceded by the reciting of a poem by Walt Whitman "A Noiseless Patient Spider," . Walt Whitman uses the image of a solitary spider patiently casting out its threads to symbolize the human soul's search for

meaning, connection, and belonging in an immense and often indifferent universe. Just as the spider repeatedly sends out fragile filaments until one finally holds, the soul—isolated yet persistent—keeps reaching outward through thought, creativity, relationships, faith, or purpose, hoping to form a sustaining connection. The poem reflects the quiet courage required to keep seeking despite uncertainty, emphasizing patience, perseverance, and trust in the unseen process of finding one’s place in the vastness of existence.

Overall Learnings & Way Forward

- Wellbeing frameworks must be rooted in justice, not detached from structural realities.
- Embodied and arts-based methods enable conversations that language alone cannot.
- Discomfort, when held collectively, can become a source of learning rather than withdrawal.
- Storytelling remains a powerful tool for bridging personal experience and systemic critique.



A Noiseless Patient Spider

By [Walt Whitman](#)

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,

Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

The third group presented a gibberish play of infants, creating an innocent world to drive home the message of social wellbeing and justice. This presentation was in the form of another act whose intention was to infuse the spirit of creativity and play especially in our social justice organising. Sometimes we wonder how to be able to listen to each other. : How the team made everyone wonder – is a wonder



Closing circle

The presentations were diverse, There was great creativity despite a short time for preparation. The teamwork was beautiful. Great creativity – doesn't need words all the time to reach an agreement, very creative and out of the box. Participants shared their experiences of being part of the presentation. Most of them felt very excited, good synergy, there are lots of stories emerging from our work, how do we tell them and what models of Equity – were required for peace and justice. When we are not at the same position can we start the process. Beautiful energy, happy to be part of the team, Wanted lightness after a heavy session, For someone who's shy, she was afraid but after others joined she felt okay. Everyone worked together. Storytelling is important. Team work was good, and some team members were good at cheering others, motivating them and appreciated every little effort. That kept the spirits high. The energy of the young people was because of the short time that people performed so well – As a teacher, trust your students.

The presentations reflected a deep level of trust, creativity, and collective ownership that had developed over the four days. Despite limited preparation time, participants were able to work across differences, support one another, and communicate complex ideas through non-verbal and artistic forms—mirroring many of the Sangam's core principles.



Workshop [Photos and videos](#)

=====End of Report=====