

31th Annual Conference of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies
Dignity and Innovation
Strategies for a Sustainable Future, with a Special Focus on Agriculture and Water
Cairo, Egypt
21-24 September 2018

Global Dignity? Implications for Paradigms of International Development and Globalization
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Abstract:

Last year's meeting in New York City was about the planet, human greed, and dignity. One key takeaway for me was that in a planet in which materiality is essential as a tool of measuring progress, the issue is that we are depleting our resources and not necessarily increasing the quality of our lives. Maybe more of an illusion. This conference theme on strategies for a sustainable future with a special focus on agriculture and water could not have been more timely and the conference location could not have been more strategically set. Egypt is where the longest river in the world, the Nile, runs long and deep. Egypt has seen the building of an outstanding human civilization thanks to this very source of water. Therefore, it is very adequate to look at Egypt as a model for the rest of the world in which water issues are a huge threat and a key opportunity to progress further. My key concern as a scholar is to investigate human understandings of dignity. Again, the context of this conference is unique particularly because it looks at strategies for a sustainable water management, as a global resource, from the lens of dignity. One way of doing so is also to zoom out to the dimension of development and particularly "measuring" dignity as a way of assessing development. A so-called dignity measure will have to integrate the inescapable problem of water management. Dignity as a concept is often studied in bioethics and philosophy. In economics, on the other hand, we see increasing attention to non-material dimension to development. Notably, the work of numerous scholars on capacity building has particularly tackled this dimension. My paper is based on a yearlong survey in which I asked people from all over the world to define dignity and suggest a model to measure dignity. From the survey data, resources management, including water, was often brought as a useful tool. In here, a key argument is that despite overwhelming data on the urgency of prioritizing water management as a key strategy for a sustainable future, communities around the world do not see such a priority. For most, social peace, political rights, poverty alleviation, and justice are far more important priorities. How to add water management as a top priority? Should we deal first with the problems people see as "more" important to gradually lift up the urgency of water issues?