I had the opportunity in early April to attend the Civil Society Policy Forum (CSPF), a series of meetings that have become an integral part of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank Group Spring and Annual Meetings. The Forum provides an open space for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to dialogue and exchange views with the World Bank and IMF staff, their peers, government delegations, and other stakeholders.

The program was broad ranging and mind expanding for me. In bringing together the aforementioned persons to discuss issues of global concern, its meetings encompassed topics such as the world economic outlook, poverty eradication, economic development, sovereign debt and investment aid effectiveness.
For those members not as familiar with the World Bank and IMF, a brief synopsis:

*The World Bank Group*, founded in 1944 is one of the world’s largest sources of funding and knowledge for development solutions. In 2018 alone, the WBG committed $67 billion in loans, grants, equity investments and guarantees to its members and private businesses, of which $24 billion was concessional finance (terms that are more favorable than market rate and with longer grace periods) to its poorest members. It is governed by 189 member countries and delivers services out of 120 offices with nearly 15,000 staff located globally. Since 1947, they have funded over 12,000 development projects.

*The International Monetary Fund (IMF)*, created in 1945, also an organization of 189 member countries, has as its mission to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment, sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world. Its primary purpose is to ensure the stability of the international monetary system—the system of exchange rates and international payments that enables countries (and their citizens) to transact with each other. The Fund’s mandate was updated in 2012 to include all macroeconomic and financial sector issues that bear on global stability.

Christine Lagarde, Managing Director and Chair of the IMF played a prominent role during the days. Ms. Lagarde, a French woman and trained corporate lawyer who was France’s Minister of Finance, is the first woman to hold this position, which she assumed in 2011.

I attended 2 events that Ms. Lagarde moderated: “Bretton Woods at 75” which was a panel of 4 young economists that looked at the past 75 years of global financial work and where we are today in terms of international cooperation; and “One on One” with Sir David Attenborough on the topic of Balancing Nature & the Global Economy, which included excerpts from his newly launched ‘Our Planet’ series. It was wonderful to see a standing room only crowd of economists and financial experts hear how the demands of a growing economy are putting unsustainable pressures on the global climate and vital ecosystems. I prayed it transformed their hearts and propels them to action!

What I found very fruitful was the Roundtable Dialogue between Civil Society & the World Bank Executive Directors. We (civil society representatives) met prior to the dialogue to prioritize the key topics we wished to discuss and to create 3 key questions for each topic. These were: Civil Society space; Debt; Climate Change; Inequality; Disability & Health; Fragility, Conflict & Violence; and World Bank Governance. The final topic was a delicate conversation on the vetting process of the new WB President; how only 1 candidate was vetted who was put forth by the President of the US, and that since the World Bank’s inception there has never been someone other than an American in this position. We raised this as a missed opportunity to
have a more inclusive, diversified recruitment process that brings in different people from other parts of the world.

The NGO Committee on Financing for Development, of which PGJ is a member, also co-sponsored an excellent and well attended panel on “Financial Inclusion to Financial Sustainability – Empowering Women across the Globe.”

I learned a lot from these engaging days of input and discussion, to include a better understanding of sovereign debt and the need to look at new structures in light of the natural disasters and other crises that are impacting the most vulnerable countries in our world.

Understanding the basics of development finance is critical knowledge for all NGO representatives and I felt fortunate to have attended and be there on your behalf.

**Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples - Traditional Knowledge: Generation, Transmission, and Protection**

*By Faith Yusko, PGJ Intern*

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues kicked-off on Earth Day this year. This was very apropos considering that Indigenous communities are among the most vulnerable to climate change. This Permanent Forum has been established as an advisory body to the ECOSOC Council and this year marked the Eighteenth Session. The theme this year was “Traditional knowledge: Generation, transmission, and protection.” The recommendations brought by representatives of these communities are a means of sharing traditional knowledge and of raising awareness about the issues they are facing globally.

2019 is officially the *Year of Indigenous Languages*. The conversation about the preservation of indigenous languages and the protection and sharing of traditional knowledge was woven into conversations and events throughout the week. Many languages are dying out with the elders who were experts and many communities lacking resources to train future generations to learn and preserve these unique languages.
My experience at the forum brings me to question, Is this forum enough? One of the speakers brought up that he and his fellow representatives traveled more than 17 hours by air for an opportunity to speak for three minutes.

One of the founding mandates of this forum is for it to “promote the integration and coordination of activities related to indigenous issues within the UN system.” Is this annual forum enough to fully incorporate and represent indigenous peoples? Of course, the representatives do more than just speak for three minutes while they are at UNHQ, but there is great truth in his observation. The side events I attended were impactful and the narratives shared are very important to change the hearts and minds of leaders who seem immune to cries to address climate change. I believe that incorporating the voices of indigenous peoples at more commissions and processes throughout the UN System would have a more positive and just impact.

There was a special portrait project that was put on display in preparation for this Forum. The breathtaking portraits done by photographer Alexander Khimushin, captures the beauty and unique culture of different indigenous peoples from all corners of the earth. I believe that the United Nations would greatly benefit from having more indigenous people’s faces as key stakeholders throughout the peacebuilding processes throughout the calendar year.

In participating in this forum, I was honored to be a witness to the stories and cultures of human rights and earth defenders from far and wide. I was captivated by the traditional languages, the colorful garments and the unique identities of all who were there. I hope to see the continued presence of indigenous peoples in the future at the United Nations.

The SDGs and Infrastructure: Turning Billions Into Trillions

By Briana Stephenson, Molloy College Youth Representative

As I learn time and time again at the United Nations, many things are easier said than done. This does not mean that they are impossible, however, as long as we start small. I virtually attended on April 16th the Forum on Financing for Development in which the main focus was development partnerships for sustainable infrastructure. I was always aware that the 17 Sustainable Development Goals shared many common objectives;

I was not aware that there were 169 individual Sustainable Development Goal targets. Of these 169 targets, 72% are influenced by infrastructure. This session really focused on the important relationship between infrastructure and the Sustainable Development Goals.
Infrastructure in this session included energy, transportation, buildings, water, food, sanitation, waste management, and telecommunications, as well as the natural infrastructure such as ecosystems and land. It was stated that if we are to reach our 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, 3 to 7 trillion dollars per year will need to be invested in infrastructure. The UN Environment Stocktaking Report emphasizes the interdependencies of the Sustainable Development Goals and how we can have a more efficient impact on our goals if we acknowledge this and plan ahead. Because the goals are so interdependent, we can make projects more attractive to investors, who will be pleased to find that infrastructure can solve many social, economic, and environmental problems that we are plagued with in the world today. One major problem that was brought up is climate change. Nature is cyclical, yet we disrupt it with our man-made innovations. Each speaker brought up the point that we must start planning now because often times, people wait until it is too late: until it is far too expensive, and until there is irreversible damage.

The UNEP has a three-pronged approach to contributing to sustainable development with the infrastructure. It includes raising awareness, mobilizing expertise on integrated planning, and supporting countries in adopting these approaches. One of the speakers was Dr. Spiro Pollalis, Director of the Zofnass Program for Sustainable Infrastructure at Harvard University. He spoke about the program developed by Harvard in 2010 called “Envision.” This program provides a framework for infrastructure projects, and through his research, Dr. Pollalis found that something very important in creating these infrastructure projects is considering the quality of life for people involved. He emphasized that infrastructure is not only environmental, it also includes important aspects such as jobs and the economy.

Another speaker from the Nature Conservancy, Senior Policy Advisor Ms. Linda Krueger added onto this from her own personal experience. She spoke about how biodiversity and the ecosystem crisis is just as severe as climate change. Ecosystems store carbon and aid against climate change. A project that she spoke about involved rebuilding the Caribbean coral reef for storm protection. The reason that this plan was so effective was that scientists were able to prove that this would be 15 times less costly than building a man-made method of storm protection. This exemplifies that if we plan and are able to share with investors cost-efficient and environmentally beneficial infrastructure projects, we have so much more potential to be successful. As she said, the environment is a solution. It can provide more jobs through restoration if more regulatory framework is put into place.

Overall, the clear theme that all of the speakers addressed was that the Sustainable Development Goals all play into each other, and if we want the most efficient impact, we must take the time and effort to plan and present our plans to the investors that we need in order to turn billions into trillions.

We have the money that we need to achieve our 2030 goals, but we must focus more on providing it to the countries who need it. Indonesia was able to increase its infrastructure stock and GDP by 8 percent from 2015 to 2019, but it remains 27% below the average global standard. If we could focus more on providing the funds to countries like these, who want to push toward more sustainable infrastructure but simply do not have enough, our impact would be enormous.

Lastly, an important step towards achieving our goal is to make available databases for stockholders in different infrastructure projects. In the same way that consumers are more likely to support sustainable businesses, investors are more likely to support sustainable projects.