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The Role of Civil Society in Post-2015 Development *Architecture: Equitable Growth and Inclusive Development*

DR JEMILAH MAHMOOD, FOUNDER, MERCY MALAYSIA

FOREWORD BY

ANAS ALTIKRITI, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE CORDOBA FOUNDATION

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Equitable Growth and Inclusive Development*
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DR ANAS ALTIKRITI

CEO OF THE CORDOBA FOUNDATION

Anas Altikriti, CEO of The Cordoba Foundation, is an internationally accredited translator and interpreter by profession and a postgraduate lecturer in the same field. He was a leading figure of the British Anti-War Movement and Chair of the 2-million Iraq demonstration in February 2003.

A hostage negotiator, Altikriti helped successfully negotiate the release of a number of hostages, including Western Christian peacemakers in Iraq in 2005. He is a media commentator and writer in Arabic and English, as well as an advisor and consultant to numerous UK and international organisations on Muslim politics, East-West relations, combating extremism, negotiations, and dialogue. He is chairman of the Muslim Association of Britain and founding member of the British Muslim Initiative.

FOREWORD

Dr Anas Altikriti - Chief Executive, The Cordoba Foundation

As we near 2015, the global processes are gearing towards reflecting on the achievements (and failures) of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These reflections have already started a process of thinking post MDGs and post 2015 towards what has been loosely termed the ‘Sustainable Development Goal’ agenda.

Yet it is clear that whilst lessons have been learnt from the MDG process, the post 2015 architecture is still slightly fuzzy vis-à-vis the voices of people from the grassroots and the role of civil society. It is in this spirit, that the Commonwealth People’s Forum convened in 2013 to provide a space for Commonwealth Civil Society to voice their views to the discussion on ‘Equitable Growth and Inclusive Development: Beyond 2015’.

The Cordoba Foundation is proud to have worked very closely with the Commonwealth Foundation in the run-up to and during the People’s Forum. The Foundation is honoured to continue that relationship in bringing this special edition of an Occasional Paper featuring the keynote address by Dr Jemilah Mahmood, titled, ‘The Role of Civil Society in Post-2015 Development Architecture: Equitable Growth and Inclusive Development’.

Dr Mahmood’s experience and expertise in the field of humanitarian response and development work meant that she was able to cast a bird’s eye view on the landscape and offer hard-hitting insights both for the civil society and governments. Her assessment of the changing face of vulnerability and her challenge for understanding true ‘resilience’ poses real questions for how governments, international institutions, organisations and civil society respond.

I resonate strongly with her call for a change in how we do things especially with respect to engaging local actors and civil society in the process. This call for change is not only for those who interact with civil society but for civil society to be able to change their way of engagement. In particular, her clarion call for a multi-pronged approach for civil society to “Split, Speak, Stay and Negotiate” offers a framework for new forms of engagement.

In a world that is mired with conflict and dictated by interests of various parties with varying degrees of influence, this type of call is refreshing and much needed. It also offers lessons as the dust settles around the revolutions of the people in many parts of North Africa, on the role that civil society and government equally need to play to bring about effective change. It remains that institutions, governmental, private and corporate also contribute towards state building.

It is our belief that any state exists not in a vacuum. It exists because of the interplay of Society and its various components. Society is what legitimises the State. Thus any decision taken by the State needs to have credibility at the society level. The post-2015 development agenda has to realise this ambition if it is to get credibility at the grassroots. This is ultimately the message of Dr Mahmood and the purpose for the People’s Forum facilitated by the Commonwealth Foundation.

We commend everyone involved in this process. Working to promote dialogue and understanding, The Cordoba Foundation is very pleased to be part of this noble project.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT ARCHITECTURE: EQUITABLE GROWTH AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

Dr Jemilah Mahmood, Founder, MERCY Malaysia

WITH 2015 fast approaching we have very little time left to measure the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to eradicate global poverty and human suffering. We know that many nations have made good progress but many more have yet to see improvement in poverty alleviation, gender, health and human rights. In this paper, originally part of a keynote address at the Commonwealth People's Forum, Sri Lanka on 11 November 2013, I reflect on the progress so far in working towards the MDGs, and stress its importance today.

I concur with the idea¹ that one of the main problems with the MDGs is that there is so much focus on goals with not enough emphasis on getting the foundations right – this includes the processes and frameworks that build the enabling environment for people and nations to achieve their true potential and a sustainable end to poverty. There is a strong and disproportionate emphasis on demand for goals when we have still some way to go towards building a really solid foundation.

We need to ensure that we do not fall into the same trap when finalising the post-2015 sustainability goals. 'Strategic Vision' will be the central pillar of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Framework. It is on the basis of this Strategic Vision that we will build the goals as an annex. Lest we repeat our mistakes, we must all work to ensure that finances, the monitoring through the high level forum and all other frameworks need to be in place, while at the same time acknowledging that the political contexts of nations greatly influence the outcome of sustainable development.

With 2015 only months away, unfinished business is now being

addressed through the MDG Acceleration Framework and this is seen to be essential to ensure the credibility of the post-2015 development agenda as noted recently by the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon.² I cannot help feeling it is a race too late for the sprint with much valuable resources poured in to achieve goals that are to be improved in the near future. Nonetheless articulation of the role of civil society in this process is crucial and must be explicitly clear.

We need to challenge our thinking as we approach the post 2015 development agenda by raising several key issues.

Vulnerability is changing. We have increasing numbers of localised disasters and crises – conflicts and geophysical events. We are also seeing dramatic illustrations of the downsides of globalisation, specifically the triple 'F' crises of finance, food and fuel. Both opportunity and vulnerability have now been globalised. There are growing numbers of communities and individuals 'living on the edge'. People are living on the edge if their lives and livelihoods are exposed and sensitive to shocks and stresses, and their adaptive capacities are constantly on the verge of being overwhelmed. Living on the edge suggests that a small push could send that community or individual over the edge. Thus, development can be badly derailed in the process. We don't have to look far to see this happening around us.

Despite this, the potential impact of the globalisation of vulnerability on the very poorest is not well understood. As Ban Ki Moon put it: '... in the face of the global financial crisis.....it appears that the burden of coping has been borne disproportionately by poor and vulnerable people. This reality is poorly understood....'³

A major reason for this lack of understanding is that the shocks and stresses we are seeing in the world today have multiple, unpredictable effects and increasingly demand – but do not always trigger – diverse responses at the local level. The global system is characterised by growing complexity, where all of our actions and intentions combined into a tangled and heaving mass of interdependence. We have created an engine for perpetual, unpredictable crisis.

Yet many international agencies have taken a narrower and institutionally defined way of dealing with vulnerability. Some cover health, others income, violence, children, or the elderly. We are facing profoundly systemic problems, and we are dealing with them in these narrow and limited ways.⁴ One area where this is especially worrying is the increasingly false distinction between development and humanitarian work. This causes profound problems for dealing with vulnerability of the poorest. As a result, the humanitarian sector is moving towards a focus on resilience – a word that unfortunately is understood by different actors in many different ways. To me, the simplest way to look at resilience is that it probably, for lack of a better word, defines where humanitarian and development could and should meet.

Building true resilience requires moving beyond narrow views of the risks we face. A linear, reductionist approach would have us deal with resilience in piecemeal ways. Danger of fire? Equip fire departments. Possible electricity failure? Turn off transformers and give hospitals generators. Risk of floods? Build barriers. But what about when all the risks hit at once: such as Hurricane Sandy or in the aftermath of the earthquake and Tsunami in Sendai, Japan and the ensuing Fukushima nuclear incident? We need a better, more inter-disciplinary, understanding of the globalised vulnerability landscape among both policy makers and operational decision makers. In other words, we need a complex systems approach to resilience. As well as better-shared data and analysis, we need to find better ways of breaking down disciplinary silos.

On top of the need to change how we think, we need to change how we do things. An important way of dealing with the growing complexity of the world, and entrenched internal divisions in international agencies, is to turn to local civil society as central

actors in the battle against vulnerability. A recent report by a coalition of international NGOs found that local and national civil society has the most to contribute to the relevance of aid, and also to linking response to development and resilience.⁵ Because local NGOs are present within the context of the situation/challenges, they are also more able to understand and navigate complexity. Local organisations rarely see the divide between humanitarian and development but look at their communities as a whole. They need to be recognised and play a more prominent role, and rightfully so, as they are the first to assist and the last to leave.

We need to avoid the trap of simply rebuilding and repairing flawed structures of the past—be it an economic system overly reliant on risky speculation or a health-care system that splits a nation at its financial seams and yet fails to deliver adequate coverage, or a series of goals that were developed 15 years ago that are simply being re-booted without being rethought. A complex, systems-inspired resilience perspective stands in stark contrast to narrow development and humanitarian paradigms and global policies that offer only minor adjustments of current behaviours, and tend to concentrate on technical quick fixes to get rid of the problems. It encourages us to anticipate, adapt, learn, and transform human actions in light of the unprecedented challenges of our turbulent world.

We need to avoid the trap of simply rebuilding and repairing flawed structures of the past.

All actors including civil society need to continue strategising and promptly acting on approaches that take into consideration these key issues, and embrace the complexity of the world we live in now. Innovate, adapt, build new partnerships and work differently if we are to have a better chance at addressing the post-2015 development agenda with a measure of success.

THE ROLE AND ACTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY: ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AND POSITIONING

We need to continue engagement and advocacy with governments to achieve recognition of the centrality of civil society in development. And greater investment is needed in supporting the conditions that help create an enabling environment for civil society to participate in development processes more fully, proactively and effectively. This will be in line with the Istanbul Principles that were adopted in the Busan Framework for Civil Society Development Effectiveness⁶; that include the need to:

- Foster development processes that are inclusive, equal and just;
- Strengthen institutions that support participatory governance;
- Commit to a framework of mutual accountability at the global, regional and national level.

How do we create more opportunities for civil society to become engaged? The lessons from the MDG process clearly indicate dissatisfaction at the level of engagement afforded to national civil society organisations and citizens. Civil society actors need to take ownership of being part of the process of contributing to the formulation of the agenda. This inevitably means we need to be sitting at the table with policy makers whether in formal or informal settings. We need to be more savvy in our collective lobbying and advocacy, to build trust where it has been lost, and to engage in constructive ways to push for real and sustainable change. We need to foster greater acceptance by governments of the role played by civil society. They should not be seen as a threat, and in equal measure, civil society should not view governments as the enemy.

We need to do this at all levels and see this through until the final development agenda is sealed and delivered to the UN General Assembly. Cast the net wide by building networks among us and with other stakeholders not in the usual room. Any group that can influence decision-making must be a partner to civil society. They can make a contribution by providing solutions that are innovative and pragmatic. If civil society actors can build the relationships

We need to be more savvy in our collective lobbying and advocacy, to build trust where it has been lost, and to engage in constructive ways to push for real and sustainable change.

and dialogue on policies, issues and possible solutions with national governments, this will eventually influence decision-making processes in the region and leading to New York in 2015.

The commitments made by the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda to 'leave no one behind' provide a real opportunity. Civil society has a role to play in connecting reliably with the grassroots and ensuring that the voices of citizens particularly the poorest and most marginalised are also heard.

We need development goals that can speak to national and sub-national priorities. This stresses the importance of localisation, which requires broad-based and inclusive processes to ensure local priorities are served, assets utilised and capacities are built. Civil society can play a critical role in public awareness to build understanding and awareness particularly at national level amongst citizens on these goals and the intended outcomes.

SO WHAT STRATEGY CAN CIVIL SOCIETY EMPLOY?

Paul Okumu, in his review of the Post 2015 Political Strategy for the Africa CSO Platform On Principled Partnership⁷ summarises it eloquently and clearly when he suggests that if we are to achieve our agenda for transformation we will need to do four things, which I borrow and amplify: Split, Speak, Stay and Negotiate!

Split

Civil society organisations are doing a great job in collecting ideas and positions but we ‘are leaving out many central pillars to the process because we are too thinly spread. There are too many of us doing a great job-but in too many narrow areas.’

If we do not split roles and seek to build synergy along these parallel processes, we will fail the process in much the same way MDGs failed the world.

All this must be clearly delineated and identified, and roles allocated urgently. Most importantly, cross-learning and information sharing, including what approaches work and what might not, must be an active process.

Speak

While civil society organisations are doing an exceptional job at engaging with the UN, Paul Okumu has identified five ways of speaking that will transform how we engage with the United Nations General Assembly and the member states. They go beyond simply speaking at the UN Assembly, and articulating our positions through the normal mechanisms. Taken together, these ways offer us an effective tool-kit for engagement.

Stay

Civil society organisations must have the patience to have their voice heard and the wherewithal to withstand protracted negotiations. Civil society organisations, suggests Paul Okumu ‘must be ready for a long journey -many meetings, many sessions, many documents, shifting positions. And that means we must consolidate our position and push. The staying power will especially be needed after this session in Sri Lanka. We cannot engage at events only. That is not staying. We cannot engage for just a year and get concerned that documents are coming out as diluted versions.’

Negotiate

The third action point suggested by Paul Okumu is the need to negotiate. Failure to do so will risk leaving key civil society concerns in the Strategic Vision (by way of appeasement), but out of the more concrete and measureable Goals section.

As Okumu puts it:

‘There are already concerns that Civil society would like to see Governance, Peace and Security, Human Rights, Transparency, Anti corruption - but we have failed to realise that any goal within the Post 2015 agenda must meet two basic requirements - it must be measurable, and the indicators must be clear and data sources universally acceptable. So the best option for governments is to appease us by putting these things in the Strategic Vision, but leave them out in the Goals.’

To meet the challenge, civil society organisations must clarify what they mean and secondly ‘spend time refining and defining, and finding opportunities for expanding the positions of governments, instead of just defining and expanding ours... It means toning down our thematic campaigns and focusing on helping the governments to come to our positions through their own lenses, not ours.’

With only one year to go, civil society needs to be better at organising resources and exchanges strategically, and demonstrate real solidarity with issues. Otherwise, I fear we may still appear to be stuck in organisational myopia and sending the wrong signals.

DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY

Governments need to create an enabling environment (laws and policies) to facilitate engagement and participation by civil society and as a first step, key gaps and weaknesses in governance processes and accountability need to be addressed. Having already been recognised as actors in their own right to effective development, they can advance the aforementioned requirement by improving their own accountability to fully live up to their potential (this being the 1st indicator in the CSO-Enabling Environment Index). With the growth in advocacy and policy work, we can't credibly attack the accountability of business/governments if we are not prepared to be genuinely accountable ourselves.

Overcoming the currently fragmented, silo approach to accountability will not only underpin CSOs' request for a greater role in the post-2015 regime but also strengthen their demand for stronger accountability of other actors in the post-2015 regime. With civil society split into two main ‘types’, it has been a bit of

a struggle. 'Humanitarian' response is typically high profile, and therefore better resourced. The 'aid architecture' doesn't help either with the two constituencies having very different characteristics, but we have finally made some progress in recognising the increasing complexity we face today and the need to stop working in silos – where development and humanitarian issues are seen as separate rather than a complex and interwoven issue.

The focus on fragile states/resilience-vulnerability demonstrates that across the development-to-relief-to-development cycle, the terrain where the two worlds meet is getting wider and wider – with increasing insecurity and vulnerability. There is a greater need for civil society to understand the integrated nature of three core aspects: humanitarian, development as well as peace building. If we are to have credibility and success in achieving sustainable solutions to reduce vulnerability, we will need even greater collaboration and working across the different sectors and also greater accountability to the people we serve.

In October 2013, representatives of accountability initiatives from the 'advocacy and development' side of the NGO community met and shared their work with representatives of the humanitarian 'quality and accountability' community. The latter commented that they thought they knew all there was to know but had learned otherwise. Based on the above, and with conversations about governance and accountability already incorporated in the post-2015 discussions, leading International NGOs have recognised among other things:

- The need for rationalisation: not just among humanitarian accountability initiatives but across the sector;
- Confirmation that there is a significant alignment and agreement on a majority of accountability principles, approaches, methodologies and standards that we share. We need to recognise and allow for specialisation in particular sectors or contexts;
- Recognition of the need for deeper conversations on accountability issues among ALL sustainable development stakeholders and not just the traditional donors but also

amongst government, private sector, major philanthropists, and CSOs/NGOs from local to global;

- The need for solidarity in 'speaking to power' to **stop** the multiplication of accountability demands that do not take into account what is already being done: adding new processes that divert scarce resources away from programmes, without any measure of added value, costs and benefits. In other words, more codes could lead to less accountability but also dispersed effort and confusion for public and other stakeholders. There are over 350 codes, charters etc., so convergence is essential.

As an example, the INGO Accountability Charter⁸ is aimed at the CSO sector responsibility for its own accountability. The Charter encompasses development, human rights, environment, humanitarian response and anti-corruption groups at the international and national level. Through the global standard project process, it is already bringing together the peak NGO bodies in developing and developed countries. How can we apply the approaches of this and other similar charters to a broader audience and take this to scale? What do we have to do to keep it simple enough for civil society organisations that are smaller yet crucial as building blocks of their communities?

UTILISE THE DATA AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION

For any new development framework to be tracked meaningfully, civil society participation in data gathering, monitoring and evaluation remains critical. The importance of going beyond the numbers to ensure quality and turning the data into powerful information to influence decision-making and accountability is critical. What can we actually do to support this? What is the power of key innovations in technology and how do we address gaps in access and quality of data particularly in the global south?

We need to be innovative and keep up with new technologies that will support good governance, accountability, advocacy and monitoring. If we are to 'split, speak, stay and negotiate' effec-

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tively, we also need to continually communicate and advocate. We are offered exciting opportunities from the tools we now have at hand with rapidly growing and evolving social media platforms and modern communication tools. Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram and, short messages (SMS) sent through the mobile phones, have 'revolutionised' aid or the way we think about it.

In his book, *Aid on the Edge of Chaos*, Ben Ramalingam illustrates this potential by referring to a classic case study from the World Food Programme, highlighted in an *Economist* article from 2007. He recounts a dramatic call for help from a refugee struggling to survive in a refugee camp. The message read 'My name is Mohammed Sokor, writing to you from Dagahaley refugee camp in Dadaab. Dear Sir, there is an alarming issue here. People are given too few kilograms of food. You must help'. This message was delivered through a text message from Sokor's own mobile phone to the mobiles of two UN officials in London and in Nairobi. He got the numbers by surfing at an Internet café at the camp. As Sokor's bemused London recipient points out, two worlds were colliding. The age-old scourge of famine in the Horn of Africa had found a 21st century response. And the familiar flow of power and authority from rich donor to grateful recipient had been reversed.

Several years later, the UN Foundation's research⁹ revealed aid agencies as especially insensitive to new mobile technologies such as Twitter and SMS, and unable to tap into their user-driven potential. Herein lies a challenge and opportunity for civil society organisations.

How can you really take advantage of the democratisation of data and information flows that we have today, even in the most restrictive states, to build networks that examine, collect, triangulate data and offer new ways of expression for the most marginalised and vulnerable? How can civil society expression be channelled through these methods without putting governments on the defence but for CSOs to be viewed as partners?

More thinking needs to be put into this. And we need young people, the 'digital cowboys', who have grown from a different starting point and view the world through different types of lenses, and may have the answers to some of our collective challenges. Beyond that, how do we get women, elderly, people living with disability, people living with HIV/AIDS, indigenous populations to express their needs and concerns to those actors remote from them? And when technology is not an option for them, what else can we rely on? The reduction in real face-to-face dialogue may be a down side of the digital age and we need to ensure, as parents, managers and leaders, that we encourage these types of dialogues. Working through a problem face-to-face is really one of the best ways of creating innovative ideas.

The exponential growth of open data also further supports efforts to enhance good governance, and offer new solutions to old problems like poverty. We need to clearly express a shared vision of good governance as a top-down and bottom-up approach that is inclusive of community aspirations and support, and technology can help us today. And of course innovations will need to draw on the best available scientific research knowledge and ideas, especially to be able to deal with the complex challenges described earlier.

STRENGTHENING SOUTH-SOUTH PARTNERSHIPS

While it is important to strengthen partnership approaches to addressing issues and problems, there is also a great need for civil society to create and foster south-south cooperation, engagement and sharing of skills to advance progress on sustainable development. We need to be better networked; northern CSOs are better at this than southern ones.

We really need to do better as actors particularly from the global

south especially among humanitarian and development actors. How can countries such as Malaysia and Ghana – which gained independence at the same time – better share experiences with each other – not only successes but also more importantly challenges? What platforms can we use to do this and capitalise on the extensive technology and tools available to us nowadays? What is the role of culture and creative expression in defining the role of civil society and how can we in the global south learn from each other, grow and progress without losing our cultural values?

DON'T LEAVE THE PRIVATE SECTOR OUT!

The private sector – seen in a broader perspective to encompass large multinational corporations, national corporations and small-medium enterprises – need to be involved in the post-2015 agenda and CSO actors need to find ways to engage, challenge and partner with private sector. Whether we agree or not, the reality is that in many developing countries, the private sector are the main drivers of economy. If we fail to engage with them, we miss an opportunity to influence more responsible stewardship and protection of our environment, resources, peace, security and human rights among many other things.

Increasingly, we are seeing companies recognise equitable community development as a critical business activity to reduce risk. This is a major change. In decades past, it would have been more common for business leaders to say that it is a government's responsibility to ensure long-term sustainable economic growth for a community, and that a company's contribution would be through tax, employment, and royalties. Now most businesses recognise that they can no longer legitimately claim that socio-economic development is not a business concern.

An increasing number of companies are looking beyond the risk-reduction argument, and seeing equitable community development as an opportunity to grow 'shared value.' The term was coined by Michael Porter and Mark Kramer,¹⁰ and reflects the view that business and community interests can be in sync. In particular, Porter and Kramer argue that businesses should search for those opportunities where value can be created for business by improving community well-being.

We are seeing companies recognise equitable community development as a critical business activity to reduce risk. This is a major change.

BHP Billiton, for example, ran a very effective anti-malaria programme around Mozal, Mozambique, where it has an aluminium smelter.¹¹ This programme reduced adult malaria infection from near 80% to a single-digit percentage. This is a huge win for the community, but also note its impact on BHP's bottom line. The reduced absenteeism associated with this improved community health so increased the productivity of assets that the direct returns more than covered the cost of the programme. The anti-malaria programme in Mozal was ultimately *profitable*.

We need to continually advocate and demand that private sector companies practice shared value. Civil society has a role to highlight to the private sector challenges the societies around them face and how solutions can be found. And where private sector can be potentially damaging, it is through the use of our collective network advocacy, dialogue, and using new technologies that we can demand for greater accountability and responsibility from the private sector.

On the other hand, we need to also learn how the private sector works – their strategies, organisational development, strengths so that civil society becomes more efficient and outcome/results driven without losing our most important attributes of humility, diversity and connectedness with people in need.

RECONNECTING WITH SPIRITUALITY AND HUMANITY

Last but not least – many of the challenges we face leading to erosion of developmental gains stem from a clash of ideologies

surrounding ‘faith and religion.’ This has resulted in extremely negative consequences from unrest, fractured social fabric to outright conflict and genocide. I challenge the notion that these perpetrators really understand faith or spirituality and denounce their use of religion as a tool for conflict.

Syria – a nation once known for its rich history and diversity, where all Abrahamic faiths have gathered and once lived in peace, is now torn apart by sectarian violence. Look east from Sri Lanka and we witness the brutality against Muslims on-going in Myanmar, a nation poised for democracy, rapid development and economic growth. It is all around us. It has to stop. How can we better create platforms for dialogues and rebuilding of trust and tolerance? We need to collectively think this through together and urgently.

We need to reconnect through the restoration of our own spirituality and basic humanity. We must respect the right to live without discrimination and exclusion. Regardless of our beliefs or orientation, every person has his/her own value and rights.

As we deal with the challenges outlined here before 2015, we must never lose focus on what matters most. People who are our partners, the very people we want to see liberated from the clutches of poverty, conflict, human rights abuses, poor health, gender discrimination and the lack of power to achieve their true potentials. We must capitalise on the wisdom and experience of the elderly, the energy and passion of the youth, and recognise the important and potential contributions of differently-abled people. We also need to re-examine how we make our assumptions and plans – and be very mindful that we see things as ‘experts’ and develop our own blind spots as we approach the problems and people we have to work with.

We need to redouble our efforts on issues that are difficult to deal with and too painful for some governments to accept, especially sexual and reproductive health rights for all women and adolescents. This means bringing to life the real life stories of the struggles women and young people face in being able to have the right to choose what is right for their health and well being. And we need to be able to engage with even our greatest opponents, in a way that respects their cultures and values, builds trust and mu-

tual respect. We must innovate, be inclusive, impartial and never lose courage and patience and find those hidden champions even within the toughest groups of stakeholders we have to deal with.

In my own experience, having dealt with a young lady about to lose her life after child-birth, I established a women’s health centre in Kandahar way back in 2002, when people thought it impossible. It required a lot of tea drinking with many tribal leaders and being a woman, contrary to what many might say about working in Afghanistan, it opened doors to homes, women, families and most importantly men, that helped us achieve our common goals.

We have many opportunities presented between now and 2015, when not only the MDGs but also the Hyogo Framework for Action in Disaster Risk Reduction are up for review and renewal. These events plus the World Humanitarian Summit planned for early-2016, provide opportunities to bring together the still separate conversations about ‘sustainable development’, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian crises, poverty and injustice. Civil society actors need to engage actively with all these different consultations, providing not only inputs to the final priorities, decisions and policies - but also clearly carves out civil society’s important roles. If we can do that effectively, we would have laid the foundations for transformative action that will help to address the complex issues that were outlined at the start of my lecture.

Daisaku Ikeda (the founder of Soka Gakkai movement) once said: ‘Where there is an absence of international political leadership, civil society should step in to fill the gap, providing the energy and vision needed to move the world in a new and better direction.’ I hope civil-society organisations work hard to realise the post-2015 development agenda, going beyond rhetoric and help bring about real transformation. We need to move from accepting a step change to aiming for a quantum leap.

Endnotes:

1. As expressed by Ambassador Csaba Koros, Co-Chair of the Open Working Group, speaking at the Session on the 'Role of Foundations and Civil Society in the Post 2015 Agenda', *Commonwealth People's Forum*, Sri Lanka, November 2013
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Tan Sri Dr Jemilah Mahmood is head of the World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat. The World Humanitarian Summit, an initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, brings together governments, UN and intergovernmental agencies, regional organisations, non-profits and civil society actors, the private sector, academia as well as people affected by crises, to take stock of humanitarian action, discuss the changing landscape, and sharing knowledge and best practices.

Dr Mahmood has held several prominent roles, including founder and former President of Mercy Malaysia; former Senior Fellow at Khazanah Nasional Berhad; Senior Visiting Research Fellow at King's College London - Global Policy Institute; and former trustee of Teach for Malaysia.

She was the Chief of Humanitarian Response at the United Nations Population Fund in New York from 2009-2011. An active member of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team, she sits on many international boards including the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership in Geneva; Doctors of the World USA (Medecin du Monde); DARA International; and INGO Accountability Charter and Teach for Malaysia. She is a Council member of the Overseas Development Institute UK and chairs the Humanitarian Innovation Fund Grants Panel, in the United Kingdom.

Dr Mahmood has been conferred numerous awards including four royal awards in Malaysia, the East Asia Women's Peace Award from Philippines and the prestigious "Gandhi, King, Ikeda Award" from USA. In May 2013, she was the inaugural winner of the prestigious Isa Award for Services to Humanity from the Kingdom of Bahrain for her contribution in humanitarian, development, disaster risk reduction, education and poverty alleviation.



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