



Communicate with Clarity & Leave No One Behind: How the UN Is Scaling Sustainability in a Post-2015 World - Parts 1 and 2



Ms. Amina J Mohammed, UN Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning

PART 1

A Conversation with Ms. Amina Mohammed, UN Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning

“Communicating with clarity,” states Amina Mohammed, United Nations (UN) Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning, “is essential for humanity to attain a sustainable future.”

On July 8th I had the unique opportunity and pleasure to speak with Ms. Mohammed about the post-2015 development process and agenda. 2015 marks the year which the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were to be achieved. Established following the Millennium Summit of the UN in 2000, the MDG’s enveloped eight global priorities in the areas of poverty alleviation, education, gender equality and empowerment of women, child and maternal health, environmental sustainability, reducing HIV/AIDS and communicable diseases, and building a global partnership for development.

During our early morning teleconference Ms. Mohammed revealed the status of the UN’s evolving global framework (termed the post-2015 agenda) consisting of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which will transition its 193 member states to mobilize their resources beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The conversation with Ms. Mohammed was delightful. Ms. Mohammed provided pragmatic insight and conveyed wisdom that has clearly been shaped by her years of tremendous experience and engagement in sustainable development. The dialog, the essence of which is summarized below, exemplifies Ms. Mohammed’s personal sense of passion, urgency, leadership and integrity.

Ms. Mohammed has been intimately involved with the UN and other organizations in sustainable development and global concerns. Before her current appointment she served as a Senior Special Assistant to the President of Nigeria on the Millennium Development Goals. In 2005 Ms. Mohammed led the coordination of more than \$1B (per year) of debt relief funds toward Nigeria’s achievement of Millennium Development

Goals. Prior to that, she supported many efforts including the Task Force on Gender and Education for the UN Millennium Project.

In 2012, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon established a task force to begin making preparations for the UN's Post-2015 development agenda. The process yielded a report titled, "Realizing the Future We Want for All," and led to the appointment of 27 civil society, private sector, and government leaders from all regions of the world to a High Level Panel (HLP) to advise the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Development Agenda of which Ms. Mohammed is one of the appointees.

Ms. Mohammed reflected, "...it has been a long road since 2012...but we are nearing the final stages of negotiation between the UN's member states on two critical elements of the post-2015 agenda, realignment and establishment of sustainable development goals (SDGs), and the fundamental mechanisms for financing sustainable development."

While there are many differences to the post-2015 development compared to the MDG process, a significant change has been the UN's emphasis to ensure the new framework and member states have defined specific forms of financing for sustainable development upfront. Their goal, to alleviate any gaps of financial need as they push to finalize their SDG's and move forward with the post-2015 agenda later this year.

"To be successful, the post-2015 SDGs will require a new kind of thinking and accountability on behalf of member states and all facets of public-private society. We are collectively working on tax reform, innovative financing, private sector investment, and a myriad of other sources of capital, financing, and support to ensure the SDGs are financed and that their full intent and impact, including the eradication of poverty, is achievable," Ms. Mohammed pointed out.

The world has changed in the past 15 years since the MDGs were established. The complexity, severity, and scale of many challenges have intensified in recent years. Although great progress has been made on the UN's MDGs, vast challenges remain on issues related to poverty, peacebuilding, women's rights, climate, food and ecologic systems, natural resource scarcity, business and governmental accountability and so on. Today there are so many converging global interests, goals, and challenges that the scale of these issues can be downright overwhelming. Where does one even begin?

That's why, according to Ms. Mohammed, the UN, its member states, and stakeholders are working hard to redefine the development agenda beyond 2015. She added, "...we've learned that not everyone is at the same level of development...although there are common themes, the needs of each member state, and even the communities within member states are unique."

To that end, Ms. Mohammed reflected on travel she made to Republic of Nauru, the third smallest state by area in the world. Nauru, an island country in Micronesia in the Central Pacific, has an approximate population of 10,000. The life expectancy of Nauruans is low, just over 60 years for males and 68 years for females. The key culprits of lower life expectancies on the island: heart and kidney disease related to obesity and type 2 diabetes. In fact, Nauruans are among the most obese people in the world, 97 percent of men and 93 percent of women are overweight or obese, and greater than 40 percent of their population is affected by type 2 diabetes.

Ms. Mohammed stated, "...the situation for every member state is different. We are relooking at the context of our service and delivery based upon the needs of our member states, like Nauru, as we define the goals and financing for the post-2015 agenda. Ultimately it's all about people and their needs. In the past we may have made provisions for food supplies to states like Nauru on the basis of addressing hunger. But we know the issues are more dynamic than that. We have had to evolve to understand people's unique needs, even dietary requirements. Thus, we have to be conscious and accountable to our services, even the provision of foods, to ensure they not only address first order needs like hunger, but also address health related concerns related to diet like type 2 diabetes and obesity."

Ms. Mohammed further commented on the need for understanding regional and state needs uniquely, "...look at Lake Chad in Nigeria...it is a puddle of a lake compared to what it used to be. Constrained water resources have transitioned the region from a thriving agriculture, trade, and economic corridor to one marked by violence and economic disparity. You have to get to the root causes in every region of the world on why certain challenges persist. Most terrorists are not born as terrorists – they are converted due to a lack of opportunity and extremism perpetuated by resource disparity and a lack of or breakdown of government structure, law, and order. The challenges in Nigeria are complex. You have to cut through the violence and get over the immediate image of what's happening to unveil the true root causes of political-societal unrest.

Only from there can you begin to understand how to realign the goals and resources to address the situation.”

Ms. Mohammed further stated, “...The past 15-years of implementing MDGs taught us a lot. We are using the post-2015 development process to take a harder look at root causes and to put a

new framework of accountability in place. This journey has shown the enormity of the global challenge. Our effort is universal, and we intend to leave no one behind. Our intent is to extend our initiatives beyond experimentation and pilot phases. We are motivated and mobilized to take our resources to scale.”

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PART 2

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The fate of humanity and that of the earth are one in the same. Ultimately it's everyone's responsibility to take an active role in their personal fate and freedom. We are the stewards of our own individual life and destiny, although for some, this form of personal freedom is often constrained by limiting factors related to health, security, conflict, education, economics and other factors. But regardless of one's life context, the choices we make on a daily basis impact not only us, but the lives of others.

Our lifestyles, convictions, and behaviors have an immediate impact here and now, but also on the fate and freedom of future generations. There are differences in the way older and younger generations live, think, and act. Those that lived through the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s have a completely different worldview than the Millennial Generation born in the 1980s. The social, economic, and environmental issues and events of the last Century cast a long shadow, yet the younger generation represents a ray of light and hope for continued change.

The generation occupying earth today has greater awareness of global challenges and our capability to address those challenges in a sustained manner. We now have greater knowledge and understanding about the impact humans have on each other and the state of the world. The interconnectedness between humanity and our economy, environment, quality of life, health, security, spirituality, and overall well-being is becoming more transparent.

Like the MDGs, the SDGs of the post-2015 agenda are being driven by a multifaceted stakeholder-driven consensus building process.

By the end of July the UN will have the framework for the post-2015 agenda established. Currently, member states have defined 17 SDGs and 169 targets, a substantial number, yet understandable considering the breadth of global challenges the SDGs will work to contend with.

The state of the world has changed dramatically since the year 2000 Millennium Summit of the UN and adoption of the UN Millennium Declaration. In particular, the speed of information, rate of change, and awareness of the global human and ecological condition and context has accelerated. The advancement, deployment, and utilization of technology in the past 15-years have been tremendous.

It has been estimated that there will be more than 5 billion mobile phone users (of which 2 billion will be smart phone users) globally by 2017. This is but one of several indicators that we are a more connected and accessible generation than any time in history. Yet the rate of technology adoption does not appear, necessarily, to correlate to a rate of change in public perception and action on many global and generational sustainability issues.

Ms. Mohammed agreed. She noted that another key difference in the post-2015 process and agenda will be a deliberate focus on retooling the service delivery infrastructure of the SDGs. Ms. Mohammed remarked,

"...education has been and remains an essential building block of service delivery, but we need to right size and align the delivery of education with the needs of the member states and global market. The hardware, software, and entire infrastructure surrounding the delivery of SDG program initiatives, such as education, are being engineered to have definitive purpose and impact. In this era of the Digital Age it may be easier to mobilize people, however the utility of our tools have to extend beyond initiating human will and presence. It must also transcend generational perspective, religious and political ideologies,

economic disparities and so on. Take for example the impact digital communications had on the Arab Spring movement. The speed of information was instrumental in mobilizing people; however no one was ready for the day after the Arab Spring. We have to find ways to communicate with one another and get past the rhetoric. We need to leverage technology, tools, and information in ways that enable long-term capacity building."

While science, economics, and politics provide the facts, data, funding, and influence - a building block of sustainable development remains undervalued and underutilized. That element is the moral obligation, character, integrity, and will of individuals to take a stance on right vs. wrong, and because values and beliefs can be (if we choose them to be), as powerful as science, data, money, and political influence.

In recent weeks Pope Francis has reinvigorated the hidden truth, that if we choose to accept the responsibility of, and act upon our moral obligation to better the world, we can take down the wall of worldly challenges, like climate change, which may seem insurmountable. Truly, the power of individual personal accountability is the single greatest potential we have for sustainable development.

Ms. Mohammed concurred with the notion that by taking action and responsibility for our behaviors, and by having the personal will to see change through, one person can truly make a difference in the world. She stated, *"...there is a large fear of the unknown among civil society, the business community, and governments. The post-2015 agenda is huge, but we will be working to communicate it with clarity, so that it does not overwhelm, and so that we can transition the SDGs beyond the MDGs in a way that allows people to get their arms around their individual and our collective roles. We are working to fit the agenda with a strong sense of purpose."* Ms. Mohammed concluded our call with a piece of wisdom. On the subject of how civil society - and every day citizens - can become engaged in sustainable development and support the post-2015 agenda she added, *"...at the end of each day, reflect on what is really important to you and your family. Extend the talents and skills you've developed for your day job into other facets of your life. Allow your convictions to spill over into your hobbies on the weekend. Allow your full life to be immersed in bettering the world for you and your family."*

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Part 1:

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2015/08/communicate-with-clarity-leave-no-one-behind-how-the-un-is-scaling-sustainability-in-a-post-2015-world-part-1/>

Part 2:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/markcoleman/communicate-with-clarity-1_b_7935670.html?utm_content=buffer1568e&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer