



**Ninth International Society for Third-Sector Research
(ISTR) Conference**

Working in Partnership Across Sectors

Keynote Address

by

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It is a real pleasure to be here with all of you today and it is an honor to address such a distinguished group of experts, activists and academics. Thank you for inviting me to this important conference. I made it a priority to come here tonight because the third sector is absolutely critical in our work at the United Nations to empower women and girls and fulfill the promise of the Millennium Declaration.

I am very proud to speak about the legacy of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, in engaging civil society and cultural agents of change for development. Without them we cannot complete our mission to realize a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

In my address I will try to approach this challenge with great humility and give you some concrete and practical examples of our work in UNFPA that you may find interesting and relevant to your own research.

The theme of my address is integration and collaboration of actors across different sectors of society. The challenges we face in human development are interlinked and to achieve results we cannot work in silos. Integration itself, not on the conceptual but on the operational and practical sense, poses a challenge for the UN; for the governments and for the third sector. But it also provides many opportunities and in my address I will try and give you some examples.

GLOBALLY

Allow me to start with the United Nations and the international aid environment. I have now 35 years of experience as an international civil servant in the UN and I can say with certainty that the UN of today is not the same UN that I joined 35 years ago. The UN has grown a great deal and it is going through major changes. During my career I have seen many reforms of the UN but I have never seen a reform as serious as the one now, because this time governments are leading the way and insisting on their right to own change. There is a serious desire and action to move forward and to do things differently. And interestingly, especially for this conference, many of these dynamics have to do with the third sector.

As you know, the world has become more open and interconnected through trade and communications, and this has brought new opportunities and also new threats across borders. While governments may still be the paramount authorities at the national level, the scope of their absolute power has been reduced and the way they work has been transformed.

The role of non-state actors in development has become progressively more influential with the transformation of civil society and its role in development. Non-governmental organizations, including non-profits, are most definitely influencing national, regional and transnational agendas for development.

During the past decade the United Nations has substantially expanded partnerships with civil society to better respond to new demands in development. There is a clear change in the official aid environment especially with emphasis of donors and partner governments on international aid that is effective and efficient, that produces measurable results and that

holds all partners accountable. And the UN needs to adapt and take advantage of the opportunities that are now present.

A wide array of new actors now jostle alongside governments—non-profit organizations, corporations, and foundations, local authorities and parliamentarians and the progressive visibility of communities. Many non-profit organizations have become major partners and actors in the development field. This has been strengthened by the shift of non-profit organizations from being charitable to mission-based organizations that target eradication of poverty through human development. At the same time, the depth and quality of their engagement has greatly improved in recent years and the resources, both human and financial, they bring have multiplied many fold.

We are all familiar with examples of very influential non-profit foundations in international aid environment such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Not only are they able to provide important funding for development, they are also now very much part of the process of defining priorities and contributing to solutions.

The Gates Foundation for example is a member of the H8 (or Health 8) that is a group of eight global health organizations collaborating to accelerate achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals to reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and combat HIV and AIDS. The members of the H8 are UN organizations, including the organization that I head, UNFPA, and also the World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNAIDS and the World Bank. In addition, the H8 includes other new development actors, namely the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, and the GAVI Alliance (the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations) both of which are partnerships of the public, private and third sector.

These alliances are examples of power becoming less concentrated and more networked. There is growing recognition that Governments alone cannot resolve today's global or local problems and they cannot meet the growing demands of their growing populations, especially in the Global South (developing countries). Non-State actors have often become prime movers in issues such as global health, alleviating human poverty, the environment, gender equality and debt relief.

For the UN, engaging with civil society helps it to identify global priorities, become more responsive and accountable, and strengthen its support base - making it better able to tackle global and local challenges, including social development. It also allows the United Nations to support the countries in their efforts for development.

LOCALLY

It is important to highlight that the UN, despite what may seem to be the facade, is not only about organizations or governments. It is also, and most importantly, about human rights and people. It is 'we the people', the first three words of The Charter, who make human development possible and ultimately benefit from it. And to deliver to the people, women and men, girls and boys, old and young, we have to keep the focus of our development work in the field.

It is in the field where our organization, UNFPA, really matters. Yes we need advocacy and leadership, both are absolutely vital at all levels, but in the end of the day what matters is

what we are able to deliver in the programme countries. And, in our programme delivery we rely on good partners that come from both the public and private sectors, but more often than not, they come from the third sector.

The third sector has a tremendous impact, and this I would like to illustrate with some examples of our own work: how we try to bring together all sectors of society to make a more lasting impact on people's lives.

Y-PEER

The first example is from our work with young people which has a great strategic importance to UNFPA. Firstly, it has strategic importance because today more than 1.8 billion people are between the ages of 10 and 25, almost one-third of the total human population. This is the largest youth generation in history and it is our mission to support them to protect and promote their rights. Secondly, as we all know, adolescence is a period of many critical transitions: physical, psychological, economic and social. It is a period of forming an identity and the transitions come with challenges and choices that are not always easy to navigate. This makes young people vulnerable to many risks, including unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, unemployment or dropping out of school, even violence, trafficking and abuse.

More than half of young people worldwide live in poverty and they often lack access to technology and information. Many of them also face social inequality, poor schools, gender discrimination, unemployment and inadequate health services. For sure, they deserve better; they deserve a world where they can develop their full potential, freely express themselves and live free of poverty, discrimination and violence.

In our experience one of the best ways to reach out to young people is through their peers. We need to reach young people on their own terms, in their own surroundings, in their own language and certainly in their very specific youth culture. This is where partnerships with civil society become absolutely vital for us. To galvanize the partnerships with young people and to strengthen them, UNFPA has pioneered a comprehensive youth-to-youth initiative called The Youth Peer Education Network, or Y-PEER.

Y-PEER has now grown to become a network of more than 500 non-profit organizations, governmental institutions, academic institutions and private sector initiatives around the world. In many ways it is a prime example of new partnerships that stretch across different sectors of society. The network is constantly expanding and now includes youth from the Arab region, East Africa, Central Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe. It was also recently initiated in Brazil. They are national, regional and global networks.

When Y-PEER first started, it was a youth network to educate young people about HIV and AIDS. It has evolved now to promote youth participation and build partnerships between young people and adults by advocating for national youth development strategies. One key area of their work is advocating for increased access to information, knowledge and services on reproductive health, sharing lessons and training resources for peer educators. Through different training events, young people have been provided with an opportunity to enhance their skills as peer educators.

Youth participation is valuable in its own right but in the case of Y-PEER, it has also created an increase in government responses to the needs of young people through the

creation of national youth strategies or advisory committees. Moreover, the governments themselves are beginning to recognize the value and need for direct youth involvement.

Y-PEER is also an example of how the third sector can successfully partner with the private sector: a joint campaign with the clothing retailer H&M yielded so far \$750,000 for the youth network. H&M has a section with products tagged as “HIV and Young People.”

All this shows that third sector organizations can not only partner with both public and private sectors but there is also great recognition and demand for their work. There is demand from their constituencies but there is also demand from the governments. Governments, and the UN for that matter, need civil society’s outreach to connect with special groups such as young people.

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Now I will talk about another area where UNFPA is benefitting enormously from partnership with civil society. This is our work with faith-based organizations. As with peer-educators, the faith-based organizations and religious leaders can reach people in ways that government institutions and even progressive civil society organizations cannot. Faith and religion play an important role in the lives and cultures of most people and the leaders of churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other religious communities play a powerful role in shaping attitudes, opinions and behavior.

Even though there is some hesitancy by some development actors and activists to involve faith-based organizations and religious leaders, our experience shows that they are important cultural agents of change, when they are well versed on issues of development and the changing social environment. Through genuine dialogue and partnership with them, we can advance our collective mission to protect and promote human rights and ensure the dignity of all human beings, without distinction.

SENEGAL

We have seen community produced results in Senegal where social norms are changing. There is an 84 per cent reduction in female genital mutilation/cutting, and this has largely been achieved through partnerships with communities and civil society. In 2009, 317 communities publicly declared that they’ve abandoned female genital mutilation and, so far, out of 5,000 villages in Senegal, 4200 villages have made public declarations to abandon the practice. This is a stunning success!

Laws provide a needed legal foundation but laws alone are not sufficient. They can not achieve their goal for an equitable society unless they are accompanied by real behavioural change. In Senegal, this change happened because a wide alliance of civil society organizations, including religious, community and cultural leaders and other agents of change, worked to ensure better understanding of the issue and therefore implementation of the laws. This was done through community dialogue and a concerted effort for change in mindsets and behavior. So while laws are necessary, they are not enough. To be effective we have to engage at a deeper level to facilitate change in the lives of individuals, families and communities. This requires listening and promoting dialogue within communities and fostering a culture of human rights.

INDIA

Let me give you another example from India. As in some other Asian countries, the ratio between the births of boys and girls in India is skewed because of prenatal sex selection and the elimination of female fetuses due to a preference for sons. Ten years ago, for example, only 927 girls were born for every 1,000 boys. In most regions in India, sons are desired for different reasons related to issues such as inheritance, identity, status, economic security, and means of support for aging parents. The high cost of providing a dowry to a daughter also contributes to the problem. These cultural, social and economic factors result in girls being viewed as a burden and lead to the practice of prenatal sex selection. Overall, it is estimated that 100 million girls are missing from Asia due to this practice.

And because of the complexities of this phenomenon including the impact of a serious demographic imbalance between the two sexes, an effective response had to engage many sectors of society. Through research and analysis, along with much public advocacy, the first step in the mid-nineties took place, which was the ban of using diagnostic techniques for prenatal sex selection. Through combined efforts of health and human rights activists in India, the techniques were first banned on regional and then national level. However, the new laws proved to be difficult to enforce so the civil society organizations, and health and human rights activists, rallied for amendments that were adopted in 2002.

The legal framework was obviously important and the new amendments made the implementation much more efficient. But what is required to fully address the problem is a change in the way girls and women are valued by society. And for this, education and dialogue are important. Outreach is being carried out through the media, and political, religious and community leaders.

To transform family and community mindsets and promote equality, UNFPA is collaborating with Women Power Connect, a member based organization focussing on women' issues, to work with 32 grassroots NGOs across 11 states of India. Through interventions with local governance councils, or panchayats, and women's self-help groups, the NGO partners have formed committees and taskforce groups that create awareness about the reduced numbers of girls, the law against sex selection and counsel families with one or two daughters - these being most likely to practice sex selection.

It is expected that if a community resolves to condemn the practice of sex selection, there will be greater social pressure on its members not to indulge in it. Some small successes are slowly emerging in the form of dissenting voices that had earlier justified the need for sons. Simultaneously and for the long term, interventions to address discrimination in education, health and opportunity will need to be tackled to ensure that daughters are valued as much as sons.

Outreach is also under way within the medical community. UNFPA has consistently worked with the Indian Medical Association for the last five years to drive home the urgency of the problem and emphasize the positive role that physicians and all health practitioners can play to stem it.

Today, members of the medical community have resolved to tackle the issue from within. The India Medical Association Ambassadors against Sex Selection (or IMA Ambassadors) is a cadre of doctors from across the country that is working to fight sex selection, talking to peers engaging in malpractice and counseling clients against discrimination. As for the

ambassadors, some have made it their life's mission to restore the rightful place of daughters in the family.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to stress that one of the best ways forward to make greater progress in the quest for human rights and dignity is to have integrated partnerships across all sectors of society. I am optimistic that this can be done because everywhere in the world you can really see how communities are coming together and networks are expanding to promote human rights and end harmful practices. Ending violence and discrimination against girls and women is one of the greatest social movements of our time.

For UNFPA partnering with civil society is not just about tapping different capacities – it is about exchanging perspectives, building respect for different types of knowledge, recognizing the power of diversity and making the invisible communities become visible with a clear voice. It is a strategic alliance.

You above all groups of actors know that change cannot be imposed from the outside; to be lasting it must come from within. And this is why community involvement is so vital. Locally designed strategies for implementing internationally agreed development goals are more effective than those imported from New York or elsewhere, without prejudicing the importance of knowledge growth and Exchange among all levels of the development communities. We have to take into account local realities, cultures and priorities; to be sustainable, development must be locally owned.

And I am pleased to report that the international aid environment is changing in this direction. Partnership and networking are becoming more relevant and there is a focus within the UN on supporting national ownership of development.

This requires a focus on inclusion, dialogue, equity and participation of broad segments of society. It is all about the human rights of every person on this globe.

I thank you once again for inviting me to this conference and look forward to our discussions.

Thank you.