

Ahimsa Roundtable 2013

Remarks on

GLOBAL HEALTH AND FAITH BASED COMMUNITIES

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My name on the agenda of your roundtable may have surprised you. It continues surprising me. I am really nobody in the global health landscape, and no more now than a human being in the global landscape itself. Addressing your very special and promising gathering, I thought that I should give you my personal introduction by telling you, in one word, how faith has inspired my work in the field of international finance. Suffice to say that if I have been a little bit more than a cold technocrat, it is because my Christian faith has helped me to see human sufferings and aspirations behind statistics and balance sheets. This makes us closer than it may seem. Now, as I have been invited to speak about the global landscape for development, its paradoxes and opportunities, without hesitating to raise provocative issues, I will start by mentioning five well known paradoxical and unacceptable realities of the present time. Later, I will try to balance them by five opportunities. I ask you the permission to focus my remarks on Africa, as Africa has been very much the focus of my activities during the last years. But the points I will raise are alas of relevance in many other parts of the world.

So let me start by mentioning five paradoxes.

If we allow these five paradoxical features to continue shaping our future, clearly healthcare will be in a very detrimental situation, the next generations will be unforgiving for us. Of course, many roundtables, as this one, would be needed to address the underlying issues these five paradoxes unveil. Let me nevertheless elaborate a little more on each of them, to try to identify a few ways out for progress.

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1. Growth and the Poor

We have in Africa very bright governance performances, but the poorest are left aside. Yes, Africa is growing now at an accelerating rate and this is the good news of the last 15 years. Africa is seen now as the hopeful continent.

Yet there is another side of the balance sheet: countries across Africa are becoming richer but whole sections of society are being left behind. After a decade of buoyant growth, almost half of Africans still live on less than \$ 1.25 a day. Wealth disparities are increasingly visible. The current pattern of growth is leaving too many people in poverty, too many children hungry and too many young people without jobs. Governments are failing to convert the rising tide of wealth into opportunities for their most marginalised citizens. Unequal access to health, education, water and sanitation is reinforcing wider inequalities. Smallholder agriculture has not been part of the growth surge, leaving rural populations trapped in poverty and vulnerability.

We have been analyzing in the Africa Progress Panel these problems more in depth in four countries: Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria and Zambia. The common roots of the problem are the same: mounting inequalities. Zambia is a good example: in the recent period, the share of income of the 10% poorest has been reduced by half, while the 10% richest has increased its share from 33% to 43%. This is a pervasive problem in Africa; it calls urgently for policies oriented toward inclusive growth. It invites also the international

community to attach for more weight to equity targets. The MDG promise was made for everyone. Yet in many countries, people who are poor, female and rural face acute disadvantages. It is time to integrate equity targets into the MDG framework. These targets could take the form of specific goals aimed at reducing gaps in, say, child mortality, maternal health, and education based on wealth, gender, rural-urban divisions and wider markers for disadvantage. Reducing inequalities in basic life-chances is a moral imperative. But it would also spur prospects for economic growth and accelerate progress towards the MDG targets themselves. This concern could have a special relevance on the issues you are particularly considering: malaria, HIV Aids... This brings us to our second paradox.

2. Healthcare, growth and equity

We all know that healthcare progresses are decisive for development, but progresses toward reaching MDG in this field are not homogeneous, frequently laggard and still insufficient.

On that I don't need to elaborate. Our friends from WHO will give you the most accurate information. Let me only repeat that we should no more ignore this basic principle of political economy, that investing wisely in health is -together with education- one of the most productive investment for a really sustainable development. This truth should no more be ignored.

3. Faiths and the global partnerships for human development

We all know the admirable transformation power of faiths in our world, but they are not given a say to contribute to the debate in spite of being key actors. The truth is that in spite of the efforts of a few commentators, and in spite of the admirable work of the "World Faith Development Dialogue" and of the even more admirable effort and inspired leadership work of Katherine, faiths are still poorly known and appreciated, not to mention that they are seen from time to time as dangerous to progress and modernization.

This is nonsense: it is both unfair for faiths, and deeply detrimental for the definition of growth strategies and mobilisation of people in support of truly human and sustainable development.

Yes, I said nonsense, because this neglect of religion in international affairs is a reflection of a larger and serious issue for global governance. It both ignores a dimension of life that is of critical importance for some 85 percent of the world's people and mutes the ethical issues that are the central challenge for humanity, the more so in an era where we face almost daily choices that can shape the very direction of humanity's future.

It ignores also the fact that faith based communities today are among the central service providers in the most troubled and remote regions, represent substantial sources of finance and human resources, and should be seen as creative and active participants in the health arena. Yet they rarely participate in and belong to the major partnerships on global health.

I am delighted to see that this roundtable will allow faith actors to be seen and treated as vital participants in the global health field, and I hope that a kind of breakthrough could follow it.

But we should go for more. As I understand, it is the intention of Jean-François and Katherine to launch an annual forum that will bring together actors from different

communities who will seek to reflect together on ways to develop and implement new and effective models. I would respectfully suggest that this problem of representation of faiths be one of the issues for the solution of which we could join forces.

I have no doubts that this better visibility of faiths inspired work could help all those sincerely committed to the tasks of human development to explore and better understand the extraordinary range of initiatives at community level. This is especially true in fragile and conflict states. This work is often on the frontiers of innovation but, most important, often aims directly to reach the poorest and most excluded communities.

4. The forth paradox is about the urgent necessity (now more and more recognized) to take a long view in preparing for the future but also our failure in associating enough the new generations to these reflexions. This must be corrected because it should be a very natural thing to associate the new generations who will be the key actors of these transformations to the design of the needed changes. We have been working hard recently, for instance on scenarios for “Africa 2050”, and we have identified very exciting scenarios allowing income per capita to be multiplied by six, and the number of poor to be reduced to 50 millions but what are the chances to realize such scenarios if they are not endorsed by the youth?

In view of the magnitude of the changes required for such a long period of time, getting the understanding, the support and the enthusiasm of the new generations for the sustained effort of development of their countries is certainly the main conditions of their lasting success. This is why I find truly exemplary your intention to share the work of this roundtable with bright students working in the key areas of development. I think it will be very important to have their reactions and contributions to your experiences of social entrepreneurship in reaching poor communities, in its faith inspired dimension. One of the key concepts of your roundtable -if I have understood well what I have heard so far- is the concept of partnership. I am sure that you will wish to develop overtime this partnership with the incoming generations and make it a key feature of the Forum which could be created.

5. I had to speak a little bit of course about finance. Finance! There are a lot of paradoxes here. I will only mention two.

The first, very close to our hearts, is the future and the allocation of a tax on financial transactions.

The second, even more important, is the fact that, while we are desperately spending our energy to increase the ODA (which amounts around 30 billion \$ for Africa), we allow more than the double of this amount 65 billion to be robbed year after year from this continent, through illicit outflows, opaque transactions with offshore companies and through offshore centres; needless to tell you the critical importance of the present belated efforts of the G8 to fight against it and to generalize rules for transparency and fiscal equity.

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These five paradoxes could be seen as expressing a rather pessimistic view of the present world. Let me briefly mention now -in order to balance somewhat this presentation-

five other features of the present environment which could have the potential to allow constructive breakthroughs.

They can, in fact, be encapsulated in five widespread recognitions today:

1) Recognition that the humanitarian and development businesses no more can be seen as separated activities of unequal dignity but, on the contrary, are seen none as equally indispensable and mutually reinforcing;

2) Recognition of the paramount and frequently decisive importance of humble personal, gratuitous care, and proximity in whatever place where human beings are in precarious situation; now we start seeing them as integral and essential part of social services;

3) Recognition of the crucial importance of multifaceted partnerships in the development policies and, of course, of the substitution of partnership approaches to mere assistance and even cooperation;

4) Recognition of the importance in development strategies, of the efforts to promote peace -of course- but also of inclusiveness, of national social cohesion and of the association of all communities to the national efforts to the construction of a better future, with a special concern for empowering local populations;

5) And, I must recognize that this fifth recognition is possibly somewhat unexpected, my own recognition of the very special fit between the joint initiative of Ahimsa Partners and World Faiths Development Dialogue on one side, and these new features of the development world on the other, with your focus not only in improving access to medicine through local production, all forms of social entrepreneurship and innovation, but also involving different stakeholders with the challenge of building bridges and partnerships, particularly with the youth of all communities, with a special attention to the nature of partnerships that can -and I take on that your very words Jean-François and Katherine- truly push the boundaries of our practical, scientific and ethical understanding. All of that with the very basic view to improving people's lives and uniting societies.

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My dear friends, this last and fifth recognition should suffice as a conclusion.

Let me only tell you all my admiration and my heartfelt wishes for the success of this Forum in propelling and inspiring the needed changes, leading to innovative new actions in the field of global health.

Thank you.

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