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## **Summary of an Interactive Dialogue on Disruption as a Force against Hunger: Calling Us into Action 2017 General Assembly of the Global Social Observatory Thursday, 11 May 2017**

The GSO General Assembly convened an interactive dialogue on “Disruption as a Force against Hunger: Calling Us into Action” on Thursday, 11 May 2017. Members and friends of the GSO were drawn from the diverse communities of International Geneva – multilateral diplomats, heads of NGOs, private sector leaders, academic experts, and senior UN agency representatives. As a neutral forum for dynamic exchanges, the GSO has been attracting participants looking for a place to explore controversial ideas on global social and economic issues ever since it was founded in 2004. The focus this year was on hunger and what we can do to enable and act on ending hunger once and for all in the world by 2030.

In spite of the progress in recent decades to reduce hunger by half, participants recognized that the status quo of current action won't get us to zero, even with continued engagement of governments mobilizing both domestic and foreign resources. More needs to be done to disrupt the system, and we understood that we needed to encourage both disruptive approaches and disruptive technologies. Our dialogue barely scratched the surface of what participants would like to explore in a call to action for a dramatically different collaboration to address hunger.

### **Initial Presentations**

We started our interactive dialogue with two presentations – one from Carin Smaller on the big picture of global resource mobilization and one from Nicolas Lorne on an illustration of the kind of specific solutions we need to shake us up for disruptive and transformative action. The big picture was drawn from a study prepared by IISD projecting what it will take to get to zero hunger by 2030 – that is, an extra \$11 billion per year in resource mobilization. Targeting where it is clearly needed is key, too, but the basic point was that it can be done with only a modest increase in investments targeted to ending hunger. Consistent with the guidance adopted in the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the report suggests a small proportion of it in additional donor financing (\$4 billion per year or a mere 3 per cent increase in donor aid) and the bulk of it (\$7 billion per year) in new domestic resource mobilization.

The specific solution featured a project entitled “Waterpreneurs”, an example of innovative and entrepreneurial resource mobilization linking small local entrepreneurs with blended and innovative financing models. Water and sanitation require delivery systems at the community level, based on smart water technologies for sustainable ecosystems based on data leveraging and data



monitoring. While water and sanitation services have typically been delivered by large public utilities, the inadequacy of the current systems for delivering quality water and sanitation, an integral precondition for effectively ending hunger, compels a search for disruptive solutions. We noted the water-energy food-health nexus – as well as the urban-rural nexus – in this zero hunger campaign.

## The Interactive Dialogue

These presentations triggered multiple interventions from the participants. Without tracking any of the specific contributions and avoiding any chronological order, we summarize here the central messages for going forward.

### 1. Resources

Yes, it was agreed that additional resources should be mobilized to target action for the 20 per cent of the world's population that still suffer from chronic hunger. We recognized that education, ending political conflict and famine, fighting corruption and vested interests (including the lucrative drug trade) had to be addressed – with resources. Not only a modest increase in donor support was needed, but an entirely new emphasis on domestic resource mobilization had to occur for the sake of long-term sustainability. Taxation was key here – even to the point of taxing the private investors who need to be drawn into the picture – but as a way to enable the public financing of infrastructure to support the private sector's initiatives.

### 2. Changing the system

Participants discussed the dilemma of entrenched interests that continue to block transformative action. Resistance comes from member-states themselves as coalitions of vested interests, such as the difficulty of enabling crop substitution for the lucrative drug trade when the demand for illegal drugs continues to grow. Donors, too, are seen as having entrenched interests and often misdirect their assistance for political reasons. External influencers are needed to overcome this discomfort by highlighting efforts to fix the underlying problems, stimulating incremental change and scaling up of new geographic alignments.

### 3. Innovation in approaches and focus

Different approaches and sources are needed to get around these barriers to change – to stop doing the wrong things, including among donors who want to maintain control of their resources. But we heard about several initiatives that were moving things in the right direction – hybrid business models for combining development with emergency settings, donors working to match entrepreneurs with investors, linking policies to broaden social protection through accessing both



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food and water, or even linking food and health to human rights, including child rights. Several participants raised the concern about water as a public right but with huge costs related to climate change. And some concerns were raised about the risks of private sector engagement in an area that has been so fundamentally established as a basic human right, whether we are talking here about the right to food or the right to water. But again the point was made that there is a greater cost in NOT ending hunger when tools are available for blending these innovative financing mechanisms into a sustainable ecosystem.

#### 4. Local intelligence

Examples were shared about the restructuring and reorganization of development assistance to incorporate more community-based priority setting. In fact, involving local populations has been shown to draw on local knowledge that is far superior to any externally imposed solutions. Participants clearly agreed that locally inspired development should be part of the transformative strategy, but they also pointed out that this is not enough.

#### 5. Implementing a global agenda

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has produced a set of universal and global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These can serve as global goals, a global agenda, that should serve to mobilize a global leadership for concerted action. Our focus in this dialogue has been on SDG 2, to end global hunger, and we fully understand how it is integral to overall poverty eradication, SDG 1, as well as to the SDGs on healthy living, water quality, education, gender, energy, sustainable livelihoods, and all the rest. We need these global aspirations to stimulate change, at whatever level, from local to global. And we need the information about measuring progress towards these goals, with disaggregated data at all of these levels.

#### 6. Ethics

Participants engaged in a remarkable exchange of ideas on the ethics of disruptive leadership. The SDGs have brought us to a different ethic, and it calls on us to become innovative stakeholders. What can we do to stimulate this? Incentives need to combine the carrot and the stick, and might even produce situations where things go wrong in order to turn the tide to embrace something radically different. Some of these solutions are clearly dependent on community-level change – and the capacity for that change to be maintained. One of our participants called it the challenge of “catching up with upstart algorithms” and asked if there is any information on this. We agree that this is an area where we have yet to have the answers.



## 7. Knotty problems of bottom 5 % and nutrition

Participants recognized that there are many significant inputs for ending hunger – such as transforming agricultural production, investing in other infrastructure needs such as roads and electricity, changing consumer demands and establishing sustainable social protection schemes. We may have focused here on the water nexus with food, energy and health, but these are all part of the SDG-driven action plan. As we looked to the disruptive strategies of new stakeholder networks to drive this action plan forward, we did take note of two “knotty” challenges. First, although the action plan has promise if we do it well to bring down the proportion of hunger from its unacceptable level today of 20 per cent, we acknowledged the additional challenge of ending hunger at the bottom 5 per cent. This is a phenomenon that exists in both developed and developing economies. It is even more complex than tackling the challenge of bringing the figure down from 20 per cent. Nonetheless, as we move to action on the gap between 5 and 20 per cent, we need to remain aware of this additional challenge.

A second “knotty” challenge has to do with nutrition. We know that ending hunger is not enough if the food we consumer fails to deliver the nutrition for healthy living. The focus on under-nutrition is clearly part of the focus on ending hunger, but we also know that there are micronutrient deficiencies and growing problems with over-nutrition that cannot be ignored. In fact, there are even links between hunger and under-nutrition on the one hand, and obesity and over-consumption on the other. So nutrition is also an additional factor in the campaign to end global hunger that will benefit from “disruption as a force” that calls us all into action.

### Going forward

In conclusion, we touched on many proposals and ideas for disruptive change to end hunger - increasing revenue from new sources for public investment, cultivating private financing and entrepreneurship, transforming agriculture, holding donors accountable, and moving out of silos to see the links between climate change, food and agricultural systems, water and sanitation. Consumer choice is key, and sustainable consumption does mean connecting environmental groups with human rights. Our interactive dialogue was a stimulating experience for all of us. Our special thanks to Carin Smaller and Nicolas Lorne for getting us started with their initial presentations. We parted company with an eagerness to continue the dialogue and to build supportive and transformational stakeholder networks to be part of the change we seek.