



Reflections on a Side Event:
Maisha – A New Life outside the Mines
Conference Room 6, February 4, 2016
54th Session of the Commission for Social Development



Panelists left to right: Bernhard Warner, Maisha Film Producer; H.E. Ambassador David Donoghue, Permanent Mission of Ireland to the UN; Ms. Charlotte Malenga Omoy, Chargee d’Affaires on behalf of H.E. Ambassador Ignace Gata Mavita, Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the UN; Ms. Bhumika Muchhala, Senior Policy Analyst with the Third World Network; and Clare Nolan, Training Facilitator with the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

The event, moderated by Clare Nolan, was a lively, innovative and creative presentation of the transformation that is occurring in Kolwezi, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The analysis of systemic issues of entrenched poverty, underdevelopment, environmental destruction and the social and cultural impacts of these on people in a resource-rich country were highlighted. Reasons for these included an extractive-based growth paradigms, corrupt and unaccountable political leadership, illicit financial flows, poor governance and failure to implement existing regulations. A challenge was issued to each one present to take responsible action through informed consumer campaigns and to be knowledgeable about the complex issues of extractivism.



Bernhard Warner, film producer, commenced saying that he wanted the film to speak for itself. He recalled a women having doubts during the preparation of the film and asking **‘but will anyone care’**. Bernhard likes to think that yes, people who view the film do care. Two segments of the film were screened. The first part captured the scenes of misery wrought through mining endeavors and the second part illustrated the practical responses of empowered

people helping themselves by providing informal school for their own children, engaging in sustainable agriculture (animal, fish and vegetable production), and establishing an empowering skills training project for girls and women. These are made possible through partnerships that bring together community organizers from the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd (the sisters who spoke on the film), technical capacity and support from the Good Shepherd International Foundation ONLUS under director Cristina Duranti, financed by Mission Cara (Ireland) and many other donors, including Good Shepherd Singapore and Malaysia.

Maisha shows what is possible when a complex problem requiring multi-faceted responses and numerous partnerships engages the people themselves to find and create their own solutions. However, while the project addresses the effects of extreme poverty from within a community, the root causes of the problem continue to persist.



The side event brought new partners to the table – the Mission of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Mining Working Group and a policy analyst. They helped us to reflect on structures that historically have contributed to the creation of poverty including the extractive development model, unbalanced trade, illicit financial flows and tax evasion which today reinforce structures that keep people in poverty. The discussion opened and closed with a thought provoking and challenging statement: ‘Each one of us bears responsibility for this situation through our consumption patterns. We carry a piece of Kolwezi in our pockets or bags in the form of cell phones, personal computers etc.’ Participants at the event considered ways of addressing this through ‘consumer action’.



All development work is relational, built on the foundations of trust, having the wellbeing of the other at heart, putting people at the center of development, leaving no one behind, and prioritizing the furthest behind. This is reinforced by recent and not so recent documents of the UN but also from deeply held spiritual principles.

Being so warmly welcomed at the Mission of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the United Nations, the flow of communication, the affirmation that indeed the Ambassador would attend, and the sharing of the proposed statement are all aspects of this relational component. The quick action of being able to replace the Ambassador at the last moment by Ms. Charlotte Malenga Omoy, Chargé d'affaires, is evidence of committed collaboration and partnership.

The project in Kolwezi was initiated by the invitation of the Catholic Bishop in that area who wished to address extreme poverty. The response came from the Good Shepherd Sisters, Kenya, who in their early days in Kolwezi were known as the 'walking sisters'. The transformation captured in the documentary for this community in Kolwezi is indeed evidence that many aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are in action, and the scenes capture the practice of many of the concepts enunciated in the declaration and the goals. However, a deeper question persists, one that was in the hearts and minds of all sitting around the room at the side event. What is wrong? Why is this sort of work not being contributed to by national and local government: upholding human rights, implementing national floors of social protection, providing schools and health services and ensuring gender equality?

The presentations and discussions sought to elaborate these questions, particularly Bhumika Muchhala and Ambassador Donoghue's presentations coming from the perspectives of civil society and a Member State. Bhumika's analysis is rigorous. She commenced by articulating one



of the most perverse paradoxes of global development, namely the 'resource curse,' describing how countries rich in natural resources had lower economic growth and worse development outcomes than countries with fewer natural resources. Natural resource extraction fuels endemic corruption, thwarts effective institutions, undermines inclusive economic growth, perpetrates rights violations, incites armed conflict and devastates the

natural ecological environment. In the analysis, we learned that rather than investing resource revenues into education, healthcare and infrastructure, corrupt politicians – in collusion with the mining companies – siphon profits and wealth from the continent's mineral and petroleum wealth into their own pockets, thereby bypassing the vast majority of its citizens. The visible effects of this were illustrated in the first segment from documentary film. Further, the lack of functioning redistributive policies, the lack of transparency in the management of natural resources revenues, and the lack of effective institutions to hold investors, mining companies and politicians accountable for violations and illegal activities all contribute to a dysfunctional state and economy, and to a structural poverty cycle people are trapped in.

Illicit financial flows, such as tax evasion, transfer mispricing, smuggling and other illegal activities were noted. The strong push by developing country negotiations and a global campaign launched by CSO's prior to the Third International Conference on Financing for Development failed to establish a Global Tax Body under the auspices of the United Nations. (I was in Addis Ababa for the Conference and witnessed the failure of this negotiation.)

It also was noted that while these aspects shed light on the grim reality of entrenched poverty, under development and environmental destruction (as seen in the documentary), they do not even begin to touch upon the social and cultural impact of mining. These include gender inequality and gender-based violence and the grave issue of child labour and worker safety, especially for pregnant women and small children.

What is required to bring about transformational change when such deeply entrenched systemic issues are hindering sustainable development for people and the planet? The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for concrete policies and actions in targets presented in Goals 16 and 17. Goal 16 aims to significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, and combat all forms of organized crime, which in turn would ensure decent work and the end to human trafficking. Goal 17, which seeks to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize global partnership for sustainable development, includes the need for action on domestic resource mobilization global macroeconomic stability, and 'respect for each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development.' Good practices identified during this discussion, including inclusive and participatory decision-making, building capacity and strengthening partnerships and institutions at the community level have begun to create an alternative development model that can be broadened and expanded to address systemic issues at a higher level. Poverty eradication and gender equality as shown in *Maisha* can only be achieved if all NGOs, national governments and businesses, at national and international levels, address these systemic issues. Without committed action on these issues, no real change can be effected.



This picture captures the scene during the side event.

Bhumika stressed that it is imperative and urgent that the international community commits to concrete actions to ensure that resource-rich but poverty-stricken countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo can channel their resource revenues into poverty reduction, human development, inclusivity and equity, including gender equality, and environmental sustainability. There are international initiatives designed to combat corruption and improve governance in resource-rich nations, in mining company activities and in international institutions. All actors have a role to play: Governments in extracting and capital-exporting countries, bilateral donors, multilateral financial institutions, the extractive industry, private financial institutions and civil society.

Bhumika noted that taking steps from transparency to actual accountability requires a civil society with the skills and training for effective monitoring. There was a call to educate citizens in auditing, accounting and tracking of revenues and expenditures. If citizens do not have these analytical and technical skills, they cannot hold public officials accountable for misusing or spending resource revenues inappropriately.

Ambassador Donoghue spoke to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, of which he was one of the two co-facilitators of the Intergovernmental Negotiations Process which culminated in a consensus agreement by all Member States at the September 2015 Summit. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development came into effect on January 1, 2016. Ambassador Donoghue explained that Agenda 2030 is a voluntary commitment and there are no legally binding enforcement mechanisms. He said that if a country were avoiding actions that could advance the agenda, then that country would be subject to peer pressure, as the understanding is that each country in a region would be scrutinizing the other's performance and that this peer pressure could be significant.



Ambassador Donoghue stressed that he was not referring to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With regard to the film *Maisha*, what is at issue here is multi-national investments. Social responsibility is a recurrent theme in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is accepted that businesses large and small have to operate according to international decent work standards and human rights and must avoid exploitation. Agenda 2030 contains all these concepts. It follows that multinational corporations should feel themselves bound by these concepts. Ambassador Donoghue noted that there is enough in Agenda 2030 to have confidence that many of the abuses will have been addressed by 2030. There is room for cautious optimism.

Some of the questions that surfaced had implications individually, locally, nationally and at the United Nations.

- How can examples such as those shown in *Maisha* be conveyed to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF)?
- A call for consumer action to highlight abuses in extractivism!
- Does political will exist to address the system that permits these abuses to happen?
- To what extent will the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development really allow us to give expression to some alternative models of development that would address the abuses? The abuses are cumulative and impact air, land, water etc. Is social responsibility is enough? What are the opportunities to address abuses, and if not at the UN level then where?
- What specific measures and actions can we as NGOs working together take?

Addressing the national level, governments must be willing and need to collaborate with civil society, with NGOs and with the United Nations to bring about and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mechanisms to enforce implementation beyond social responsibility are very important because social responsibility on its own lacks true oversight capacity and can only go so far. It was noted that in 2014 the Human Rights Council established an intergovernmental working group to draft a legally binding treaty to hold Multinational and Transnational Corporations accountable for human rights obligations. It was announced during COP 21 in December that Monsanto has been taken to the International Criminal Court in The Hague over violations on the GMO issue, food security and the right to food. There is room for more engagement of civil society in advocacy with the G20 who give direction to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Often the UN is separated or cloistered from the international bodies that have more financial and economic power. How can these relationships be addressed at the UN and with the HLPF in implementation of Agenda 2030? More dialogue and civil society engagement with the G20 is required.

With regard to specific measureable actions, the effectiveness of peer and moral pressure was noted. Why not mount consumer awareness campaigns to name and shame companies into making appropriate changes for decent work, and human rights? Why not build consumer outrage using the documentary *Maisha*, which illustrates that the gadgets we are so addicted to, these same gadgets are so entwined with human rights violations, are so much part of the very abuses we abhor.



Follow up: Concrete steps requiring advocacy on multiple levels:

1. Presentation of grassroots projects at the High Level Political Forum
2. Continue membership of the NGO Committee on Financing for Development and the NGO Mining Working Group advocating for a Tax Body at the UN and binding agreements on the business community
3. Study and have more awareness of business practices, supply chains, production and consumption patterns, and national financial policies towards mobilizing strong consumer campaigns at local level.

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See the film Maisha: A New Life Outside the Mines at www.maishafilm.com