

**High-Level Event of the President of the General Assembly on the Contributions of Women, the Young and Civil Society to the Post-2015 Development Agenda**

**Panel Intervention by Ireland's Minister of State for Trade and Development  
Mr Joe Costello**

**United Nations, New York, Friday 7 March 2014**

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**Panel Discussion 2: Strategies for the effective, inclusive and participatory roles for women, the young and civil society in the Post 2015 development agenda: Identifying best practices, tools and mechanisms, and exploring opportunities for the new, transparent and sustainable outcomes.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the outset, I would like to pay tribute to the many civil society organisations, including women's groups and youth groups, who are playing an important leadership role in the Post 2015 discussions to date.

We look forward to continuing strong engagement with you at all stages of our deliberations.

As the 'Government representative' on today's panel, I would like to focus my intervention on some of the best practices, tools and mechanisms that I believe *national governments must utilise* to effectively empower women, the young and civil society.

**Empowerment or participation is about more than having a seat at the table.**

**It is about having the capacity, information and space to advocate effectively for your rights.**

**It is about putting in place structures and institutions that provide the space for real participation and that respect, protect and fulfill basic rights.**

The UN's Myworld survey has canvassed the views of over 1.4 million people. The findings were clear.

They highlighted that better education, health and job opportunities, and a better and more responsive national government, are the top priorities for many citizens around the world.

Similar messages have come from consultations all around the world.

Ireland has had the privilege to support the work of the Participate Initiative which conducted research with some of the poorest and most marginalised people, in over 100 countries.

The findings conveyed many of the same messages – Beyond the very basic necessities of life, people want opportunities to get ahead themselves, and they want institutions that they can trust.

**Building effective and accountable governance institutions at all levels is one of the most important 'best practices' that we could implement in the context of Post 2015.**

These institutions must ensure the realisation of the full spectrum of human rights – both civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural.

The realisation of these rights is fundamental to empowering women, children and young people and civil society actors.

But these basic principles should extend beyond these groups – We must ensure rights of all social groups, including migrants, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, LGBTI individuals and other marginalised groups, when designing the Post 2015 framework.

**Another critical element for achieving empowerment will be a 'data revolution.'**

The importance of greater investment in data collection and ensuring accessibility of information cannot be overstated.

**As Lord Kelvin famously said 'If you can't measure it, you can't improve it'**

Take the example of gender equality and women's empowerment.

A major constraint to designing policies to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment is the scarcity of gender-disaggregated data available to technicians, planners and policy makers.

The UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics has made significant investments in improving the best practice and guidance available to national actors.

Its adoption of the minimum set of gender indicators last year was an important contribution towards developing a common basic set of indicators to guide the measurement of gender equality.

However, there are still major challenges. Nearly one third of these indicators suffer from significant statistical gaps.

For example, because income and consumption data are collected at the household level, headline income poverty data does not address gendered-poverty or unequal intra-household distribution of power and resources.

Similarly, data on women's participation in local governance institutions is still scarce.

There is also a lack of country-level data collection.

Although the production of gender statistics has improved, the focus is still on areas such as mortality, education and labour force statistics.

There is less investment in the measurement of more complex issues such as violence against women or unpaid care work.

The urgent need for investment in better data is necessary for gender equality, as well as many more aspects of the Post 2015 framework.

**We also need to make sure this data is accessible.**

**This goes to the heart of one of the most fundamental aspect of achieving empowerment – providing citizens with the information they need to empower themselves.**

**All citizens should have the right to know how their governments use resources to achieve national development priorities.**

The United Nations has done an exemplary job in leading the public consultation process around Post 2015 and ensuring that information is available to all, via their websites and through regular consultations processes.

This should be the case at all levels.

At national level, legislation and institutions which enable oversight, facilitate public consultation and ensure freedom of, and access to, information are critical to empowering citizens and society as a whole.

This information should not only be available, but it should also be *accessible and understandable* – This is particularly true for children and young people, and for those who may be marginalised, due to lack of education or literacy skills.

There are many examples of good practices in this regard.

Ireland's Ombudsman for Children's Office, for example, makes information on legislation and policy available in a language that children and young people can understand.

Technology provides huge potential to reach exponentially larger numbers of people with information that they can use to empower themselves.

However, we must also recognise that the poorest and most marginalised may not have access to this technology.

This is why it is essential that we look at both the 'supply-side' and the 'demand-side' when we are considering issues of empowerment and participation.

**We must not only ensure we supply information, but that we eliminate any barriers that may stand in the way of people accessing that information.**

**If women, young people and civil society enjoy basic civil and political rights, and are empowered with access to information and data, we will have gone a very long way to achieving a participatory and inclusive Post 2015 Agenda.**

Ireland also believes that a strong and empowered civil society is essential for sustainable development. Civil society has an important role to play in demanding better services, universal respect for human rights and greater accountability and transparency from governance institutions at all levels.

However, in recent years, civil society actors have been subject to increasing pressure. Restrictive legislation and repressive practices have led to stigmatisation, harassment, and even criminalisation of civil society actors.

As a member of the Human Rights Council, one of Ireland's national priorities has been to address the important issue of 'civil society space.'

Our commitment to the protection of civil society space continues in the context of the Post 2015 development agenda.

We must all recognise the crucial importance of the active involvement of civil society, as indispensable for building peaceful, prosperous and democratic societies and advancing the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

**Civil society must continue to have a seat at the table and be a central voice in all of our deliberations between now and 2015.**

However, we must do more than this.

**The Post 2015 framework must include goals and targets that contribute to achieving empowerment for all, including women, the young and civil society.**

Priorities in this regard include not only the fulfilment of basic economic and social rights, but also the right to equality and non discrimination and the right to personal security and freedom from violence.

As I have outlined, the right to seek and receive information, the rights of freedom of association and speech, as well as the right to participate in decision making will also be absolutely crucial.

Ireland will continue to champion these issues as essential elements of an ambitious and universal framework.

Thank you.