

**VISIONARY CONVERSATION**  
**MONICA SHARMA - Director, Leadership and Capacity Development,**  
**UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries,**  
**Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States**  
**21 January 2010**

In outlining her vision for a values-driven international system, Dr. Sharma emphasized that public policy must shift to allow the United Nations system to function as originally envisaged. The UN thus needed to be more empowered by all actors, including Member States and NGOs. Four possible operational strategies in this regard could be:

1. Cultivation of personal leadership capacity to shift existing patterns of thinking and strategic action
2. Access to facts and information that have not been sanitized or politicized
3. Create networks and partnerships in every sector – development partners, government, business and civil society- that solve problems, shift systems and source “wisdom” and values
4. Pro-actively create an enabling environment



With respect to the support for this vision, Dr.. Sharma pointed to the UN mandates themselves as well as to individuals with integrity in the system. Challenges included bureaucracy and power dynamics, but she noted that it was important to know how to navigate the system, not making the system wrong in a generic sense but looking for what works, what has potential and identifying specific opportunities.

In terms of options for the way forward, she said that it was not a matter of finding leaders but for the institutions to support persons who have vision, leadership capabilities and integrity. Frameworks for this would include: formally, by ensuring that rules are fair and transparent; by linking action to results; and by using lenses to filter out rhetoric. It was important to know how

to deal with the everyday pressures and retain integrity. She noted that one cannot teach or coach a person to have integrity, but we must support them to manifest integrity. Recent trends over the last few decades, including globalization, privatization and the emergence of critical new global problems, have created a new set of development challenges, blurring accountabilities

With regard to options or actions that one can commit to take in furtherance of the vision, she suggested a more vibrant NGO world, focussed on results, and a clear role for the UN is essential. It would be useful to move away from talking about issues to having conversations that involve commitment to results around tangible issues and discuss how to achieve it. The fundamental questions are – how can we shift systems and source wisdom?

**The follow-up discussion covered the following:**

**With respect to a vision for the international system**, one element identified as key was building accountability based on local strengths and the will and visions of citizens themselves, with the rebuilding of Haiti providing one possible opportunity.

**Regarding the reality to be addressed**, participants said they saw varying degrees of evidence of a paradigm shift, with most change being small and incremental steps forward in what would likely be a long-term process. It was emphasized that the UN's biggest asset is its field presence and action. Fear and compliance are often negative forces. A participant noted that paradigm-change was often preceded by some discomfort, so current unease may be the seed for positive change. Drawing reference from changes around food policy decision-making over time, Dr. Sharma noted that politics and policies are being shaped by new actors and considerations, and the UN risked becoming irrelevant and ineffective if it did not have a new paradigm that was cognizant of the changes – this was important since “the integrity of the UN was the integrity of the planet”. Groups such as GVI could provide support and encouragement for individuals facing the challenges of living and working with integrity.

**In terms of options for the way forward**, one participant said that she was working to incorporate new ideas from heterodox economists into the knowledge database that informed UN thinking on development economics. A second participant was promoting more open governance in the decision-making process at the office. Another saw value in educating others about the new perspectives and inviting them into the paradigm shift.