

Liberating human potential

Martina Fuchs (www.realmedicinefoundation.org)

It is my belief that it is every person's human right to live a life in dignity with access to food, water, shelter, healthcare, children's education and livelihood. This is what Real Medicine Foundation stands for. We believe in the human ability to transform – that the people in developing and disaster-stricken areas are most capable of creating solutions to their unique challenges. We employ, train and educate locals, enlisting cutting-edge technology and modern best practices, thus producing innovative solutions and strong communities that sustain and grow livelihood capacity. We ignite the potential of the people we are supporting – turning aid into empowerment and victims into leaders.

The challenges are systemic. We are at a crossroads as the entire approach to humanitarian work and development needs an overhaul. One reason that new approaches are implemented so slowly is that many don't know about the intricacies and challenges of the work.

Challenges human rights faces today

As per a new report, published by Oxfam, eight men own the same wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity. Oxfam's report shows that the gap between rich and poor is far greater than had been feared. It details how big business and the super-rich are fuelling the inequality crisis by dodging taxes, driving down wages, and using their power to influence politics.

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"It is obscene for so much wealth to be held in the hands of so few when 1 in 10 people survive on less than \$2 a day. Inequality is trapping hundreds of millions in poverty; it is fracturing our societies and undermining democracy. Across the world, people are being left behind. Their wages are stagnating yet corporate bosses take home million dollar bonuses; their health and education services are cut while corporations and the super-rich dodge their taxes; their voices are ignored as governments sing to the tune of big business and a wealthy elite."

Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of Oxfam International

Between 1988 and 2011 the incomes of the poorest 10% increased by just \$65 per person, while the incomes of the richest 1% grew by US\$11,800 per person – 182 times as much.



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Women, who are often employed in low-pay sectors, face high levels of discrimination in the workplace, and who take on a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work often find themselves at the bottom of the pile. Based on current trends, it will take 170 years for women to be paid the same as men.

Oxfam interviewed women working in a garment factory in Vietnam who work 12 hours a day, six days a week and still struggle to get by on the US\$1 an hour they earn producing clothes for some of the world's biggest fashion brands. The CEOs of these companies are some of the highest paid people in the world. Corporate tax dodging costs poor countries at least US\$100 billion every year. This is enough money to provide an education for the 124 million children who aren't in school and fund healthcare interventions that could prevent the deaths of at least six million children every year.

What needs to be done

In order to create a society more focused on human rights, governments need to change the way they think and operate. Government officials need to stop placing special emphasis on GDP and deliver policy initiatives that actually work for all citizens, not just the privileged few. This is how we can end the extreme concentration of wealth which will trickle down to end poverty. By increasing taxes on both wealth and high incomes, governments can ensure a more level playing field as they generate funds needed to invest in healthcare, education and job creation.

There is stark competition among governmental bodies but if they work together, they can ensure workers are paid a decent wage. This seemingly bold move would put a stop to tax dodging and the race to the bottom on corporate tax.

Corporations on the other hand, need to place emphasis on their employees instead of their shareholders – and governments need to support this initiative. The multi-billion Euro company Mondragon, is owned by its 74,000-strong workforce. All employees receive a decent wage as the company's pay structure ensures that the highest paid member of staff earns no more than nine times the amount of the lowest paid.

To end the cycle of poverty, governments need to also ensure economies work for women. They must help to dismantle the barriers to women's economic progress such as access to education, the unfair burden of unpaid care work, and being under-paid as well.

How RMF is leading efforts

RMF's believes in 'Liberating Human Potential', encouraging leadership and ownership in our teams and the people and communities we are supporting, building capacity and long-term self-sustainability for eventual independence.

We are fully aware that the work in the development sector and our approach is 'David against Goliath', but the only way things can change is by people being the change. That's what we stand for and that's what we have been doing with high-impact projects and increased success rates for more than 11 years now.

Conclusion

The present crisis presents a monumental opportunity to allow development to take the lead in the evolution of a new approach: an approach framed in terms of justice, and focused not on symptoms but on systems. And in the frame of this systems change, values have to be re-evaluated. Are we really treating each other as a global human family, with respect, dignity and compassion for each other? Are we allowing each other equal access to the resources on this planet, acknowledging that every single human being is valuable and deserves to live a life of dignity?

RMF firmly believes Nelson Mandela's view: "It always seems impossible until it is done." In this spirit: We believe that a paradigm shift is possible in our lifetimes. And we will not rest until it is achieved because it's up to us.

Dr Martina Fuchs is the founder and CEO of *Real Medicine Foundation (RMF)*, a non-profit organisation providing humanitarian support and development to people in disaster- and poverty-stricken areas of the world. She brings a unique perspective to the aid and development community; that of a trained and practised physician, specialising in paediatrics. Dr Fuchs has worked and trained at *Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, Germany; Children's Hospital Los Angeles, California; Dr Félix Bulnes Hospital, Santiago de Chile, Chile, among others.* She holds a PhD in paediatric psychiatry and graduated magna cum laude from *Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, Germany.* She also holds a fellowship in paediatric intensive care and is trained in alternative medicine. In 2011, Dr Fuchs was honoured with *Lifetime's Remarkable Woman Award* for her focus on improving access to health care around the world.