

UNSDN Interviews: Rt. Hon. Kim Campbell, Former Prime Minister of Canada

Posted by [UNSDN](#) on May 13, 2013



Right Honorable Kim Campbell, Former Prime Minister of Canada,
Member of the Club de Madrid

1. From your perspective, what would empowerment of people mean in practical terms?

In practical terms, empowered people are able to speak and act for themselves; they are able to take responsibility. The results are almost always positive. People, and the society they live in, are more vibrant and dynamic. People no longer have to wait and depend on others to solve their problems. And if people are able to take responsibility, they invariably act responsibly: they look after the community and the weaker members of the community; and that sense of community stretches wider and wider to those different from themselves; they look after the environment because they live in it and know the consequences of neglecting it or exploiting it in unsustainable ways; and they are more economically active and productive, feeling a sense of pride and ownership in the establishment where they work or the small enterprises they set up themselves.

2. Based on the Club de Madrid experience, what are the best methods for creating a sense of empowerment in people to eradicate poverty, achieve social integration, full employment and decent work for all?

I assume you know that the Club de Madrid is a network of former presidents and prime ministers (over 90 of us) who have experienced many of these issues first hand and now work with each other and with current leaders to find solutions to the challenges we face.

We are very aware that the reality is that many people are disempowered – they are marginalized and disadvantaged; they are unable to contribute to their society; and they become alienated and despondent. What a waste of human potential! Instead of contributing to society in the ways I have already mentioned, they become a burden on society. This is particularly evident for those who are seen as different either because of race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender, age, etc. They are often dismissed as irrelevant or even as a threat. Of course treating people like this only builds up problems.

It is much better to invest in building a society where everyone feels they have a place and that they belong. In the Club de Madrid we call this a Shared Society and we think it is such an important issue that we have established the Shared Societies Project to alert people to the importance of overcoming social divisions and providing ideas on how it can be done.

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We know that marginalization has to be reversed. People need to be recognized as stakeholders: that they have a stake in their own land; their environment; their workplace; their children's school; and so on. We talk about the importance of people having "voice" and by recognizing them as stakeholders one cannot deny them a voice. The International Labour Organisation *Convention No.169* deals with the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples to be consulted about decisions and plans which affect them. Twenty two countries have ratified this convention and Peru for example has passed a law on the right of consultation for indigenous people.

Rights also need to be recognized. In many countries traditionally land was held in common and so in modern times the land rights of indigenous people were often ignored. As a result they have not been able not invest in it or use it fully. Now these rights are being recognized. Only last year the Indian Government agreed to protect the land rights of poor dalit and tribal communities, which could affect 400 million landless people. In my country, Canada, the First Nations have been able to use their land to establish successful businesses. Similarly in New Zealand the award of fishing quotas has allowed Māori to develop the biggest fishing company in the country to the benefit of both the Māori and the national economy. Not only have developments like these restored pride and confidence but the original inhabitants have gained renewed respect from the rest of the population. So a Shared Society (which is an empowered society) makes good sense.

We also know that people need to be able to act for themselves and that means that their rights have to be recognized and that discrimination has to be challenged.

Education is also important not least because people are better able to make informed decisions. I acknowledge that people without formal education have intuitively and through experience known what was needed for the good of their community, and I would not want to take away from that. But we also know that education makes a profound difference to people's life chances and that access to education for young girls not only makes a huge difference to them but also to their future families.

Underneath it all the dignity of every individual has to be respected. If we respecting the dignity of others, we will be sensitive to their feelings, support their full participation in society and defend their rights.

3. Can inclusive social policies empower people?

The Shared Society Project has shown that building a shared or inclusive society is a benign circle and each development reinforce the others – if we respect others we are more open to ensure that people different from ourselves can play their full part in society, and as they play a full part in society we come to appreciate them, understand their needs and concerns and come to respect them.

So a Shared Society creates the opportunities and the space for people to take responsibility and become empowered. But it is also true that as people become empowered they are also able to influence society and ensure that it becomes more inclusive and shared. Empowerment in itself does not ensure social inclusion and a Shared Society, though it makes a significant contribution; while a Shared Society by definition is one that will ensure that all sections of that society are empowered to express and fulfill themselves.

Currently there is much discussion of the post-2015 Development Agenda to follow on from the Millennium Development Goals. Because of this benign circle in which social and economic

inclusion and participation and empowerment are closely interlinked with all aspects of development, we are arguing strongly that these aspects need to be expressed in the new set of development goals.

4. What international norms would be helpful in encouraging governments to promote empowerment?

I think it should be clear from what I have said already that international norms and conventions do support and encourage governments to promote empowerment and shared societies. I mentioned already the ILO *Convention 169* on the rights of indigenous people and many other ILO Conventions also are helpful, as is its Decent Work Agenda and advocacy for social protection so that the state ensures that all people have not only a decent job but basic financial security.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the many other statements of human rights are also very important in entrenching norms such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, though of course it would be invidious to pick out specific norms, because they all go together as a package to ensure that people are able to play a full part in and contribute to society.

I have also already mentioned the Millennium Development Goals and of course the UN Millennium Declaration was a very important reaffirmation of many rights which, if they are respected, promote empowerment and inclusion.

As I said earlier we see the search for a new set of Development Goals as an important opportunity to bring empowerment and Shared Societies into the centre of the discussion and show that they are themselves drivers of development. “Making poverty history” is of course important but it is not enough. If people are given a basic income, but are not able to fulfil themselves, make their own way in life and play a full part in society, then they will be left as discontented outsiders. We saw this recently in the Arab Awakening. While many people have been raised out of poverty in the last decade, inequality has increased and we know that extreme inequality drags a society down. On the other hand a Shared Society and empowered society enhances the possibility of meaningful development.

Sharing and empowerment should therefore be at the heart of development and that means we need to identify goals that advance communities in that direction. We can debate how those goals or norms should be expressed in the new development agenda. It could be a goal to increase political participation at all levels; it could be a goal that the rights of all sections of the society are protected; or it could be a goal that all communities have fair representation in the work force and/or fair access to land. With such provisions in place, all sections of society are then able to be involved in working together to achieve the other goals. Whatever goals we identify, they need to be tangible and measurable so that we know if they are being achieved. But we still have time to reach a consensus. The important immediate task is an agreement that we include goals related to inclusion and empowerment.

5. In what ways innovation and technology have an impact on empowerment?

Innovation and technology are already having an impact on empowerment, in particular information technology. I have mentioned the Arab awakening already and it was very much enabled by the use of social networks. People, often young people, who had no opportunity to participate in society through

conventional means, were able to express themselves through social media and it proved to be a powerful and empowering tool.

Access to computers also means access to information and the possibility of making more informed decisions. We have heard of peasant farmers who are able to use text messaging to learn the state of the market which helps them to know how best to sell their crops. People also gain information about how their political leaders are performing. This keeps us on our toes. These are not small things. They make a difference.

But we must be careful. Many people do not have access to the modern communication tools and others have limited skills for using them. Basic literacy becomes even more important. We need to embrace technology but also ensure that disadvantaged and marginalized people acquire the skills to ensure that they are not farther disadvantaged and marginalized because they are not able to take up the new technologies available.

More widely, I am fascinated by the way other technologies are affecting disadvantaged marginalized communities. I am thinking of systems to keep food fresh; to grow crops with minimal water; to provide electricity through small scale renewable systems which replace dangerous and unhealthy kerosene lamps and stoves; and simple inoculations that prevent life threatening illnesses. The list goes on but it provides security at so many levels – health, food, physical, etc. We need to roll these simple technologies out and ensure they reach the more disadvantaged and marginalized and as a result they become empowered and part of a Shared Society.