As we begin this session, I would like first to acknowledge the passing, just one week ago, of a valued member of this Board, and a steadfast friend of UNICEF: His Excellency, Mr. Mårten Grunditz, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations. Mårten’s career and efforts here at this Board exemplified Sweden’s commitment to the world — and most importantly, his country’s commitment to the children of the world. He will be missed — personally as well as professionally.

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Today I’d like to discuss with you an issue that has profound implications not only for UNICEF — not only for the United Nations — but touches each of us in this room…every hour, every day: the information technology revolution and our hyper-connected world.
What does this revolution mean for our common mission, to serve children everywhere? What does it mean as we begin a year of building new momentum for children — through a post-2015 agenda which must have their rights at its heart? And how should it require and offer new ways of changing the nature of our partnerships — how they develop, whom they involve, and how they serve the children?

Changes in technology sneak up on us almost daily. Whether it’s a new device or social media platform that brings people together in common cause…or desperately asking our children to help us to install new apps on our smartphones. Every year carries us farther — sometimes exponentially so — from the world of just 10 or 20 years ago.

The pace and reach of technology is exciting…unrelenting…and sometimes, overwhelming. In a 2010 speech¹, the former CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt, made a startling claim. He said: “There were 5 exabytes (or 5 billion gigabytes) of information created between the dawn of civilization and 2003. But that much information is now created every 2 days.”

In other words, imagine 10 yards of books (1 gigabyte) on a shelf. Multiply that by five billion — 50 billion yards of books — and that’s how much information is being created every 48 hours. A notion no doubt exciting for most…and frightening for some. Filled with promise…but also fraught with peril.

Peril far more dangerous than the 1,700 irritating banner ads the average internet user faces each month…or the 35 text messages the average American receives each day…or the countless — and indescribably boring — cat videos and photos of what people ate for lunch.

Far, far worse than that — peril to children. Peril when a boy is bullied over social media. Peril when a confused youth is recruited online to join an extremist group. Peril when a young girl is sexually exploited online. And the constant peril of growing inequities, when a boy with an internet connection has a distinct advantage over a boy without one.

Peril…but also promise. The promise of technology to create new opportunities for those who want to make the world a better, safer place for children. Especially the most disadvantaged children.
Almost five years ago, at my first Board meeting, we discussed the importance of equity, of reaching the most disadvantaged children whose rights are most severely denied. We couldn’t have predicted then how technology would now be playing such a central role in this mission.

Today, mobile phones and rapid messaging technology are reuniting families through Rapid Family Tracing and Reunification in South Sudan. They’re speeding up HIV test results in Zambia and Malawi — and registering children’s births in Nigeria. And they’re helping to deliver education in Uganda. Technology has brought the distant promise of reaching all the most disadvantaged — and thus, fully delivering on our equity strategy — ever closer.

But as technology helps us reach the most disadvantaged, it also helps the most disadvantaged reach us. Now four years old, U-Report uses SMS technology to put communities in direct contact with both UNICEF and, more importantly, governments — prompting and urging their governments to take more immediate action on local needs. After all, who knows better what communities need than the people actually living in those communities?
We now have U-reporters in 11 countries — including in Liberia, as that country grapples with the Ebola crisis. On average, U-reporters exchange two to five messages with us, and their governments, each week — that works out to more than 3 million messages going back and forth per month.

And technology has greatly strengthened UNICEF’s ability to keep children’s rights at the centre of global discussions — specifically through digital media. More than 2.5 million people visit our website using mobile phones each year. About 1.2 million people on Twitter see our tweets every day. On Facebook, we reach about three million people per week — and more than a third of our audience is 25 years old or younger.

This is significant as we build our digital media efforts around an increasingly younger audience — millennials, in particular — who, unlike most of us here today, have never known a time in their lives without the internet or mobile phones.

But while UNICEF and other UN agencies have made strides in embracing the changing world, can we do more to use technology to bring people together in common cause? For around the world, people are already engaging in all manner of virtual conversations.
Yesterday’s “top-down” world has turned on its side, replaced by today’s “horizontal” world. A challenging illustration of relevance to us in this room: 20 years ago, when I was a diplomat, I could represent my government and, largely, my society to my diplomatic counterparts. In today’s horizontal world, societies — and the citizens who comprise them — are representing themselves to each other.

Technology has fundamentally transformed the ways in which ideas, influence and information are shared and, ultimately, used. Conversations about development, for example, are no longer dominated only by those in national capitals or UN buildings. Through technology, communities, civil society groups — including NGOs and faith-based organizations — as well as businesses and ordinary citizens are all amplifying their voices.

So our challenge and opportunity is this: how can we use this change to forge new partnerships that can improve the lives of children everywhere?

Two years ago, UNICEF conducted an examination of trends over the next decade, and asked how to adapt our operations to fit a rapidly changing world. We called it “UNICEF 3.0.” It focused, in particular, on our partnerships — partnerships with donors, with NGOs, with communities and others.
Traditionally, such partnerships have been largely contractual arrangements in which one party supplies resources, another arranges for goods or services to be delivered, and yet another delivers them. Such transactional relationships were somewhat constricted in focus and scope, leaving less room for thinking through problems together…and for finding new and more efficient ways to assist those in need.

In particular, UNICEF 3.0 challenged us to look beyond the *status quo* in our partnerships, to transcend traditional mandates and instead, find new ways to work with our partners to improve the lives of children everywhere.

We have an opportunity — and more, an obligation — to ask practical questions about our partnerships. What expertise or resources does each partner bring to the table? What role should each play? How can we think through problems — and their solutions — together?

Because the wide range of ideas, information and influence available in today’s world informs and guides what we can accomplish together…who our likely collaborators should be…and what form our collaboration should take.
From formal partnerships — to structured networks and alliances — to informal partnerships — to campaigns and movements that are more organic and horizontal. Each opens doors to anyone who cares about a particular issue…each can bring more people together in common cause.

Of course, our traditional, formal partnerships aren’t disappearing — and shouldn’t. Partnerships are in our DNA. Whether it’s working shoulder-to-shoulder with governments, NGOs in the field, or with our sister agencies across the UN family, UNICEF’s activities have always revolved around partnerships.

Primarily, partnerships with governments. From working with the government of Bangladesh to improve health and nutrition outcomes for children…to our work with the Philippines to help children affected by Typhoon Haiyan…to our efforts with the government of India on the AIDS Prevention Education Programme…and our efforts in Madagascar and Mali, which will be presented at this session of the Board — UNICEF’s partnerships with, and support for, governments will always drive everything we do.
But this does not mean that our partnerships are frozen in time. For example, at this Board session, we’ll be discussing a new policy to maintain UNICEF’s presence in high-income and middle-income countries, starting with Uruguay, which recently became a “high income” country. This is an important opportunity not only to continue the effective partnerships we’ve built with countries over the decades — but to collaborate to find new ways of reaching those children still being left behind in every society, including developed countries, as we seek to reflect our universal mandate throughout our partnerships.

Our partnerships with sister UN agencies are also critical — and will remain critical — to our mission. As we work, for example, with WFP in South Sudan to deliver nutrition to malnourished children…with UNHCR to help shelter and protect Syrian refugees…with WHO and WFP to address the Ebola crisis unfolding in West Africa and with UNDP to build resilience in affected communities. We’ll also be considering, at this Board session, a new report on the partnership between UNICEF and UNAIDS to address the rising prevalence of HIV among adolescents.
Of course, resources are — and will always be — crucial to UNICEF’s partnerships, and indeed, everything we do. From the generosity of governments, to our network of National Committees, to our partners in the private sector — we’ll continue to rely on our extraordinary donors to do all we must do, in every circumstance, in an ever-more-dangerous world for children. That’s why, for example, we’ll be having a discussion at this session on the importance of increasing our Emergency Programme Fund ceiling to address the needs of children affected by the growing number of emergency situations we’re facing around the world.

But as critical as resources are to all of UNICEF’s programmes, the donor-recipient partnership should never be seen as a one-way street. Rather, it is an increasingly symbiotic relationship. While recipients depend on donors, donors depend on recipients’ effectively achieving the best possible results, and reporting them with a clarity and transparency that can build and maintain public support in donor countries and among other shareholders.
As governments are all-too keenly aware, technology has lifted the curtain for citizens on how their tax dollars are being spent. As the curtain has risen, so too have public expectations that these resources be spent effectively — including resources for development. New information flows present an extraordinary opportunity for donor governments not only to build awareness of global development challenges, but to unite their citizens in contributing to solutions. An opportunity to truly make the “local” “global”…to put the lives and rights of the world’s children at the centre of political debate…and to firmly position development at the heart of a country’s foreign policy agenda. We must do our part by showing cost-effective results in emergencies and development projects.

But even as these resources are bringing our programmes to life, the limiting word “donor” can mislead us. That’s because our partnerships with donors are transcending resources. We’re increasingly working through challenges together, focusing our expertise and experience to develop solutions that work. From working with France on the issue of child soldiers…to our work with Canada to advance the Muskoka initiative on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health…to our work with Japan to strengthen routine vaccinations and eradicate polio in Afghanistan…to our partnership with USAID to improve access to clean water, sanitation, health and nutrition in South Sudan…to our efforts with Britain and the European Union to protect a generation of Syrian children.
And our partnerships with the private sector are certainly breaking through the confines of traditional “donor-recipient” cooperation. As our Supply Division works with companies to reduce the cost of essential commodities like vaccines…and as we work with businesses to improve the specifications of products like toilets and water-purification devices.

But as we move to strengthen our traditional partnerships in new ways, we must also look for new opportunities to work through structured networks and alliances, such as global programme partnerships.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative is a good example — one that has achieved the dramatic result of a 99 per cent decline in polio cases since 1988. Through this public private partnership with over 200 countries and 20 million volunteers committed to the cause, more than 2.5 billion children have been immunized.
The GAVI Alliance is achieving similar results, bringing down the cost of lifesaving vaccines, and helping WHO and UNICEF to vaccinate half a billion children over the last 15 years. All by bringing together businesses, investors, governments, UN agencies and other partners, including the Gates Foundation. And as we witnessed at the record-breaking replenishment event in Berlin last week, GAVI continues to evolve, with contributions from new partners in the developing world and from countries like China, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia — and a new partnership with global businesses like UPS to strengthen local supply chains.

But not all partnerships need to be formal networks or alliances…not all need to be institutionalized, or involve a transfer of funds or resources, as with formal partnerships…not all even need a name. Instead, increasingly, we also collaborate through informal, temporary partnerships — bringing together disparate groups depending on the comparative advantage of each.

For example, the battle against Ebola is showing how a variety of partners can come together in different ways, focusing individual efforts on a common goal.
I must first mention the extraordinary dedication — and courage — of UNICEF staff members who are part of this effort. Like our colleagues in dangerous circumstances around the world, their daily efforts, leadership, and commitment to children inspire us all, as they help affected countries turn a corner in this battle. Once again, I thank them not only for their work, but for the example they set, each and every day, through their professionalism, personal sacrifices, and always, grace, amidst this historic outbreak.

UNICEF is, of course, just one part of what has become a truly global effort. Nigeria’s polio teams are now working on Ebola. DRC, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Cuba are among those putting forward medical teams. The Netherlands provided a vessel — the naval ship *Karel Doorman* — to deliver aid supplies. The British Government has been working with the government of Sierra Leone, UNICEF and NGOs to construct 46 Community Care Centres across Sierra Leone. UNICEF is working with the private sector to define equipment specifications — and with faith groups in Liberia and Sierra Leone to provide psycho-social support to children and families affected by Ebola, and to promote safe burial practices to stem the outbreak. And USAID’s continued strong support is helping re-start education for Ebola-affected children in Liberia through schools that will soon re-open.
And we often see informal partnerships come alive through south-south and triangular co-operation, as countries share ideas and best practices with one another on how to grow economies, build infrastructure and improve access to health, education and nutrition for their citizens.

Campaigns are another way to bring partners together to draw not only attention to, but action for, children.

UNICEF has been closely involved in No Lost Generation, a campaign in which governments, civil society groups and UN agencies are joining forces to protect and educate the children of Syria.

Our #EndViolence campaign is making visible the previously invisible crisis of violence endured by children in every society. The campaign has reached millions of people in over 190 countries. The hashtag appeared on Facebook over 40 million times, and stimulated media coverage around the world.

And our Imagine campaign is challenging the world to imagine a better world for every child, through an innovate app that raises awareness about the rights of children, 25 years after the Convention on the Rights of the Child came into being.
And as technology has dramatically expanded the reach of our campaigns — and thus, our message — it has adrenalized the growth of movements.

Large but loosely knit…diverse yet driven by people committed to the same causes…social movements have a long history of sparking, building political will for, and ultimately carrying out, positive change.

Movements have always existed, but in the past, before the information technology revolution, they took a great deal of time and effort to build and co-ordinate. With a reach that previous generations of activists could scarcely have imagined, movements now have a powerful and direct means not only of making their message heard, but drawing like-minded people into a common circle of influence. Social media can organize, sustain and help grow movements faster and more effectively than ever before, as groups share information, broaden their memberships, and multiply the number of partners dedicated to the same causes.
Movements can also be a powerful pillar of support for governments’ development efforts. The initial success of the Scaling-Up Nutrition movement in improving access to nutrition is due not only to government commitment and resources — but to the commitment of networks of activists and experts from around the world who are using technology to draw attention to the scourge of under-nutrition, and to organize for change. That includes about 1,500 national and international NGOs — including 290 in Tanzania alone — that are committed to the cause, and about 80 companies lending their experience as well as resources.

But movements require a different kind of leadership. True movements are led from within, not from “on high” in national capitals or at the UN. UNICEF cannot simply assert leadership. Being part of the conversation within movements requires a different way of thinking and acting.

In this, we can use Lao Tzu as our guide. He said: “To lead people, walk beside them.” In other words, to lead from within. This is more important than ever before, as we shape a post-2015 agenda focused on closing, in every society, the inequities that continue to hold back tens of millions of lives… and on improving the health, education, nutrition and protection of every child, everywhere.
In a horizontal world, just as we cannot simply proclaim our leadership, we cannot impose sustainable development goals. Which is why the United Nations has put an inclusive consultation process at the heart of the goals’ development.

But more than this, we should use these goals as an opportunity to build or strengthen popular, broad-based movements around such goals as saving our environment, ending extreme poverty, promoting women’s rights, and — of course — child survival, health, education, nutrition and protection. Movements to which we each lend not just our voice, but our own particular expertise...our resources...and our experience.

Since the start of the post-2015 process, we’ve worked closely with five leading NGOs: Child Fund Alliance, Plan, Save the Children, SOS Children’s Villages and World Vision to put children at the heart of the new development agenda. And we’re supporting Action 2015, which is a diverse and growing movement of more than 1,200 organizations, coalitions and partnerships in over 125 countries all supporting our shared commitment to the environment, development and global human rights.
As we work with others — as we lead from within — UN agencies must check not only our egos, but often, our logos, at the door. We must walk next to our partners, bringing our expertise, reach and experience to the table. As we’ve done within movements like Scaling-up Nutrition and A Promise Renewed.

In such ways, the “vertical” world of the UN — the world of high-level panels, task forces, and of course, world-class diplomats — can become more engaged and influential in this horizontal world. Can — and must. Because if UN agencies fail to do so, we risk irrelevance. Vertical measures will be lost in a horizontal reality. At a minimum, we will fail to unlock the many benefits that embracing change can bring to our programmes…and thus, to the children depending on them.

So at the UN, and within governments, we can look at this as a challenge, or as an opportunity — an opportunity not to evade this new world and its complexity, but rather to embrace it, and to use the changes around us to forge new partnerships…new collaborative efforts…new ideas…new solutions…and new movements that will improve children’s lives, safeguard their futures, and build a better world for us all.
The world is indeed ever more fractured — and more flat. It’s a world in which a dizzying quantity, and often dubious quality, of information can be found at the touch of a button — but information that can be gathered and organized just as quickly. It’s a place where divisive ideology can spread far too easily — but where cohesive efforts to help the most disadvantaged can blossom as well.

Our job is to see beyond the perils to the promise of the technological revolution. A promise that will be realized not only by traditional centres of power…not only by governments and UN agencies…but by those millions of global citizens, newly empowered by technology, to channel their ideas, passion and commitment in support of our common cause: the children.

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