

ABCs OF MSD: Z IS FOR... ZEAL

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We've been accused of being dogmatic zealots in pursuit of sustainable development at scale. So what, as a wise person once said? For the logophiles out there, how did we get from 'zeal', with its warm and fuzzy meaning of 'great energy or enthusiasm connected with something that you feel strongly about', to doughnut-wielding zealots? Arguably for those working to improve lives and livelihoods, shouldn't we all have great energy and enthusiasm to work towards lasting impact? As systems approaches continue to spread and [frameworks](#) to define and describe systems and changes proliferate, let's remember to 'keep the zeal and keep it real.' Our ABC blog series this year has tried to do just that – to balance the ambitious optimism to do better with the art of the possible – by sharing insights from our own twenty-five years of experience and complemented by a dozen generous collaborators.

'Keep the zeal' – an ambition to do better

A heady combination of energy and enthusiasm alone will of course not result in more inclusive economies and societies. This series started with a [nod](#) to one of MSD's key advocates and architects, Alan Gibson, and how his zeal for doing better shaped the evolution of the field. Zeal for doing better is a thread woven throughout this series. From Jake Lomax digging deep into the [doughnut habits](#) of practitioners to Rachel Shah's guidance on diagnosing and influencing social [norms](#), we are all better placed to avoid stale doughnuts whilst understanding the social norms of stale doughnut consumption. In financial services, Joanna Ledgerwood and Mayada El-Zoghbi challenged current thinking on inclusiveness – [for whom](#) [thanks, Joanna] and [so what](#)? [yaaaas, Mayada] And recently, Tim Stewart schooled us on the progress and prospects of MSD to target the [ultra-poor](#), and Justin van Rhyn summarised recent thinking on systems approaches to the 'next big thing', [youth](#) unemployment.

But keep it real – grounded in the art of the possible

Youth unemployment, women's economic empowerment, and mitigating climate change are gargantuan tasks. Often donor programmes have limited time and funding to influence, so we need to check our 'zeal' with some reality. Co-conspirators and collaborators graced us with their hard-won insights along the alphabetical journey. From Sarah Barlow's real talk on [challenge funds](#) to Razik Fazle and Sadia Ahmed's reflections on structuring and managing [partnerships](#), to Julian Hamilton-Peach's [maneuverist manifesto](#), documenting and sharing 'what works' in facilitating inclusive development benefits us all. And 'what works' is often dependent on who is doing it. Here, Dan Nippard confessed his [project management mistakes](#) in the spirit of continual improvement and Paul Keogh's treatise on [teams](#) is a must-read for any manager out there. When it comes down to it, people make the difference. Are you the [X-factor](#)?

As we embark on a new stage in our own organisational development, we remain committed to inclusive sustainable development at scale with new colleagues and partners. Call that zeal if you like. But as Jim Tomecko put it, it's [just good development](#).