

# Opportunity II: Mission Possible

**NOON SALIH:** The people you just heard are all making pledges in an upside-down room, where you walk in the sky, through the clouds, and when you look up, you see Planet Earth.

In here, it is all upside down. And from here, we look at our planet from a distance. What is it that you see? What can you do to save it? And what is the one step that you can take that can make it a better place to live?

In this room, nearly half a million people made pledges to take small but consistent steps in their day to day lives, for a better world.

## MUSIC

**ANOOSHA ALMARZOUQI:** It's upside-down for us to create a moment of reflection, one. And two, it's one of our "wow" moments. So we flipped your view and we're saying, "Well, we're not on Earth anymore, but you're looking on Earth. What would you like to do ? What is the thing that you would want to make a change in? And it all starts with you."

My name is Anoosha Almarzouqi and I'm the director of the Opportunity Pavilion Mission Possible.

**NOON SALIH:** This room is part of the Opportunity Pavilion, or Mission Possible. One of the three main thematic pavilions at Expo 2020 Dubai.

This pavilion was inspired by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals of 2030, or the SDGs. Its aim is to turn them into a journey. An experience that breaks those 17 ambitious goals into steps and projects that each one of us can employ.

**ANOOSHA ALMARZOUQI:** All of the pavilions onsite have an SDG focus one way or the other, but we wanted to say here with the SDGs, "It's all up to us." And we wanted to bring it out from a human perspective, to be able to tell stories of how achieving those SDGs actually changes lives.

So we did it through storytelling; we did it through gaming. And we wanted to say, "We're all changemakers with the little steps that we take."

**NOON SALIH:** The upside-down room is where your journey in the pavilion concludes, after you've learned about the 17 SDGs through interactive games and storytelling installations.

It gives you a chance to reflect on the innovative planet-saving projects that you were introduced to. And it leads you back to the plaza, the entrance to the pavilion and where your journey had started — if you are curious about what happens in between, this episode is for you.

In the second part of our series on the theme of Opportunity at Expo 2020 Dubai, we will embark on a tour inside Mission Possible, Expo's Opportunity Pavilion, and take a closer look at the intention behind its design.

I'm Noon Salih, and this is Inside Expo, an official podcast of Expo 2020 Dubai, where history is being made.

**[INTRO STING]**

**NOON SALIH:** Your entryway to the pavilion is a huge plaza. Its flooring is made of terracotta bricks, which is also the exterior cladding of the pavilion itself, forming a carpet made of terracotta representing the “Earth,” where human activity takes place.

The plaza is shaded by a 32-meter high canopy. It is made of steel and is covered in mesh fabric representing the clouds.

The central plaza and the pavilion were designed by AGi architects, a Kuwaiti-Spanish architectural studio. We spoke to Nasser Abulhassan, Kuwaiti partner and co-founder.

**NASSER ABULHASSAN:** We did it in a very strategic way, where we actually went back to the roots of human interaction, and human interaction always started from the public realm, and started from the plazas, and started from the courtyards. And people used to organize themselves around these public events.

So we said, why can't we reinvent a plaza that could hold the aspirations of the people? [It] starts from the ground itself, which is what we call the carpet. And this carpet is the warmth of the Earth and is elevated all the way to the clouds, which are the canopies that we have put together, which is overarching the public realm, which we have created within the Opportunity Pavilion Plaza.

## MUSIC

**NOON SALIH:** The terracotta flooring is dense and porous, providing thermal insulation, while the sky, or the canopy, transforms when lit from within, creating an artful atmosphere. The plaza is designed to create a figurative oasis, welcoming people and immersing them in a world of peace and tranquility.

The idea behind the plaza stems from the notion of opportunity itself. Because it is only when people come together and connect, that opportunities come to life. It is when they are welcomed into a peaceful, restful place that they can start to have a dialogue; it's how they can start to dream.

**NASSER ABULHASSAN:** And the roof structure that we have created is actually a roof full of dreams, which are these clouds that are hovering right above this plaza.

From the first instinct, no one knows how we actually managed to have these six layers of clouds that are stacked right on top of each other, hovering above the plaza. No one understands their structure. No one understands how we actually manage to hold them up on these seven pillars that are extremely disguised within the overall project. But all the responses of the users are actually shade and wind. And these were the main drivers from our point of view to make this plaza work.

**NOON SALIH:** The plaza leads you to the pavilion. But if you stop for a minute and take in your surroundings, you will notice that it is the plaza, and not the building, that stands out in the Mission Possible experience. And that is because of what Anoosha and Nasser just explained. It is where people meet and connect that opportunities are born.

**NASSER ABULHASSAN:** For us, the building, as it stands right now, it's the background for the plaza. So the buildings themselves are not the important elements within the Opportunity Pavilion; what is important is the plaza. We've used a material, which is a terracotta brick, which we've used on the floor as a carpet. And that carpet begins to wrap around the facades of the structures. Obviously, we're trying to hide the buildings as much as possible because they're not the focal point. The focal point is the person.

The scale of the building is not very big. It's very human centric. Obviously, if you look at it from the outside, you believe it's big, but the minute you go through — because of the programmatic requirements — the minute you go through the public plaza, it has actually a very humane scale.

**NOON SALIH:** The idea was not to celebrate a certain building or a specific style of architecture, but rather to celebrate human beings and what humans can do when they are comfortable, at peace and connected.

At your pace, and when you are ready to move on from the plaza, the pavilion's doors are to your right. As you walk in, make sure to turn and look at the horizon. Because the way it was designed is that from the pavilion's door, you can see all the way through the pavilion's plaza and all the way to Al Wasl Plaza.

### **Music**

**ANOOSHA ALMARZOUQI:** As you walk into the pavilion, you will be greeted by the Opti dance. Opti is one of the Expo mascots, and he's the guardian of the Opportunity Pavilion as well. So you'll see Opti dancing. And as you descend up the stairs, in a few minutes after that, you will see a traditional folklore dance happening in the plaza. To your right will be our queue line, which has totems in there that speak about the Sustainable Development Goals and as well as our three tracks, and then you get to choose a track. So either water, food, and energy.

From then on, you move into the first space into the pavilion, which briefs you about the importance of water, food, and energy and the Sustainable Development Goals, and briefly introduces our three guides: Mariam, Abel and Fatma. Then, from there, you go into your own specific track. So you're either in a farm in the UAE or you're in the village in Zanzibar or you're on the mountain in

Peru. You get to hear the stories of the three guides, of why they decided to make a change. And you play the game.

**NOON SALIH:** The 17 totems in the queue lines introduce the SDGs using interactive graphics. They will ask you questions that help you put those SDGs into the context of your own life. Like “Could you imagine if your family only had \$2 a day?”, “What if the only water you had access to made you sick ?” or “What would climate change mean for your favorite animal?”

### **Music**

**NOON SALIH:** The exhibition inside the pavilion is divided into three tracks: water, food and energy, the basic necessities we need before we could even start to think about opportunity.

Visitors get to choose which track to follow. Through each track, you will be guided by the story of a person who made a change in their community with projects related to either water, food or energy. Three people and three true stories from around the globe.

**ANOOSHA ALMARZOUQI:** We found three people who've made a change in their communities and they're not famous. Some of them do not have a lot of resources, but we want to tell our visitors [that] change does not need a lot of resources. It does not require you to be famous.

So these three people are: Mariam Aljenaibi from the UAE. She's a sustainable organic farmer, and she teaches people how to farm, even if they have a small space. In the water track, we have Abel Cruz from Peru, and he provided water to his community by harnessing fog. He placed fog nets and captured the fog and

then provided water from there. And we have Fatma Haji Juma from Zanzibar who learned how to become a solar engineer to provide access to electricity to her community.

### **Music**

**NOON SALIH:** After you have learned how each project operates, you will be transported to the project's universe; a mountain in Peru, a village in Zanzibar or a farm in the UAE. And this is where your own mission starts.

**ANOOSHA ALMARZOUQI:** We asked visitors themselves to create a small change in a fun way. So we have them go through and play games. So in the food track, visitors are balancing fertilizer, water, and sun to grow a plant. In the water track, they are capturing fog by the fog nets that they have. And in the energy track, they're charging a solar panel by following the sun to provide electricity.

**NOON SALIH:** We spoke to Mariam Aljenaibi, the Emirati urban farmer and one of the pavilion's mentors.

Mariam has a farm in Dubai and sells produce in an adjacent showroom and online.

**MARIAM ALJENAIBI:** Basically we are [an] agent for many products and we are proud to be agents for a specific product called "Autopot." It's an agri-tech system. People can grow their own food without using any energy; not electricity, not solar panels, just pure physics and mechanics by gravity and osmosis theory of the plants.

**NOON SALIH:** Mariam's urban farming method relies on gravity, whereby a closed cycle of water runs down the plant vertically, according to a calculated system. The autopot system not only requires zero energy but it also saves water. This

method is very easy to use by non-professional farmers, who continue to receive support from Mariam and her team even after the purchase.

Autopots are set up in greenhouses on rooftops or even balconies and can be used to grow various fruit and vegetables.

Mariam started working in urban farming in 2015. Besides sustainable and organic farming, she is keen on debunking myths regarding agriculture in the UAE.

**MARIAM ALJENAIBI:** I just like to remind people here in UAE, farming is not new. People from a long time ago, they were growing their own food here. And they were self-sufficient in what they were growing. I have stories... Like they grew wheat before in the mountains, in Ras Al Khaimah. Like they know how to do it. We just need to know how we do it now with the technology, with the resources that we have, with the development that's happening here. That's it.

**ANOOSHA ALMARZOUQI:** We normally do not see a lot of females within the farming communities. We see some, but not as many. But we also wanted to bring her forward as well to say, "Everyone can do this. The only thing that's stopping you from doing a change is your belief." And that's what we wanted to shatter with these stories to say, actually, we're quite powerful. And you know, we go about our daily lives. We are busy. We sometimes forget how powerful we are. And we wanted to say with these three stories, "Simple change. Not a lot is required. But look at the power and the effect of these changes. And you can do it too."

## MUSIC

**MARIAM ALJENAIBI:** We inspire people to grow their own food. So if they grow their own food, they have food safety. If they do it right, they will preserve their

resources and they will prevent poverty, because maybe they can use it, sell it, or they will be self-sufficient in what they are growing.

**NOON SALIH:** After you've given a hand in the project of your choice, you will move on to meet some community members, whose lives were changed by the three featured projects. You get to hear from them, firsthand, how certain resources, or the lack thereof, really shape our lives.

**ANOOSHA ALMARZOUQI:** What we wanted to do is we wanted to touch the hearts of our visitors. Because when you touch the heart, you create a momentum for change; you create a reason for change.

The stories that are there are all real stories. We traveled to all of these locations, met all of these people and by making it relatable, you're actually bringing it home.

## **MUSIC**

**NOON SALIH:** And from this room you move on to another called "Mission Shared".

The walls of "Mission Shared" are a large exhibit of people and projects that contribute to a better world. In here, we discover an even larger collective of changemakers. People that are not so different from you and I but have been doing incredible things towards the 2030 Development Goals.

**ANOOSHA ALMARZOUQI:** And this is where we do a recap of why the guides decided to act.

Around the room, you'll also see projects from Expo Live. Expo Live is a grant program that has funded startups that have a social impact around the world, just to say to our visitors, there are others who are doing this as well. And you see the Sustainable Development Goals in front of you. So the Expo Live projects actually are an example of people who decided to create a change within their communities.

So it's a nice way for our visitors to know that, aside from the impact that we have as individuals, Expo also has had an impact into other people's lives by actually finding these projects and funding these projects.

## MUSIC

**NOON SALIH:** The center of the room is a table that is the colorful wheel of the 17 UN SDGs. Above it, an image of Planet Earth as seen from space, reminding visitors that humankind has only one home, and we need to take care of it.

The Garden of Pledges, where this episode started, is where you would go next, your last stop in the Opportunity Pavilion.

**ANOOSHA ALMARZOUQI:** And we're saying here, what can you do to make a difference? And we've provided different pledges for our visitors, so across different categories. So things that you can do in the house, things that you could do at work, things that you can do in your community. And these are small pledges. So for example, one of the pledges is, "I will turn off the water tap while I brush my teeth." It's a small action, yes, but it has a big impact if we keep doing it.

One of my favorite ones and the one that I pledged was, "I will keep the AC temperature to 24 degrees [Celsius]." In a place like the UAE, where the climate gets really hot in the summer, it's a bit of a challenge. But also that's the most

energy efficient temperature, and by doing so we are creating a ripple effect, if we all continue to do those small actions repeatedly everyday.

**NOON SALIH:** On an interactive surface, visitors can choose one of 32 pledges in the five categories of home, school, work, neighborhood and society, or they can coin their own pledge that they commit to keep going forward.

In this room, visitors are no longer guided. They are invited to take all the time they need to read and reflect on the pledges that had been made by themselves and others.

**NOON SALIH:** Outside The Garden of Pledges, you are back to the plaza, because eventually, it is all about coming together in one shared space.

## MUSIC

**ANOOSHA ALMARZOUQI:** Throughout the Opportunity Pavilion, we tell our visitors, you can make a change in the world no matter how small that change is. And the opportunity subtheme is all about unlocking the potential of individuals and communities. And we're telling our visitors, "Yes, you can solve for the Sustainable Development Goals and make a change. No matter how big they are, you are still able to do that with the ripple effect of your actions." So although we're on a mission to eradicate poverty, end hunger and protect the environment, this mission is possible through our small changes and the small steps that we take in our daily lives.

**NOON SALIH:** This episode, the second and last in our series on Opportunity at Expo 2020 Dubai, was a journey through the Opportunity Pavilion, Mission Possible. It is also a journey through human innovation, celebrating what comes of our coming together, and what each and every one of us can do for a better world.

**NOON SALIH:** Inside Expo takes you behind the scenes at Expo 2020 Dubai, sharing our stories and others across the 170-year history of this global event. Learn more by visiting [VirtualExpoDubai.com](https://VirtualExpoDubai.com).

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