

Helen Clark: The Sustainable Development Goals: Key Considerations for a People-Centred ASEAN

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My thanks go to the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations for hosting my lecture today on the “Sustainable Development Goals and Key Considerations for a People-Centred ASEAN”.

Last month at the Sustainable Development Summit in New York, world leaders unanimously adopted “Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Agenda 2030 is a bold, ambitious, and transformational agenda. It is also a universal agenda – applying to all countries. It is about both means and ends. Its human development goals are complemented by goals promoting inclusive growth; decent work; essential infrastructure - including energy and information communication technologies (ICTs); and, that fundamental precondition for sustainable development, peaceful and inclusive societies. Agenda 2030 is clear: “there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development”.

The Sustainable Development Goals will, I am sure be consistent with the vision for a people-centred ASEAN Community which ASEAN member states are developing. We are hearing the same language of socially responsible, people-oriented, people-centred development.

How Agenda 2030 was formulated, why it is needed, what it calls for, and how it can be implemented are themes I will explore in this lecture today.

Putting Agenda 2030 in context

Agenda 2030 builds on the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which flowed from it. While the MDGs encompassed both human development and environmental goals and targets, in practice these tended to exist in silos. The new agenda and goals more consciously link the concerns of people and planet – recognizing the interdependence of human wellbeing and healthy ecosystems.

For Malaysia, many of the MDG targets represented no serious challenge. Malaysia in half a century has been transformed into an upper middle income country. That doesn't mean that it has no development challenges – but they are of a different order, and the new SDGs are highly relevant to Malaysia, as indeed this universal agenda is to all countries.

The truth is that Agenda 2030 requires every country on earth to lift its game. Environmental degradation is affecting the prospects of people everywhere. Growing inequalities are straining social cohesion in many countries. Lack of inclusive, effective, and accountable institutions in others is creating tensions. All these challenges are covered in Agenda 2030 and its goals.

It is also important to note that Agenda 2030 is complemented by three other major development-related processes this year:

- Already in March, in Japan, the *Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction* took place, and wrote the global agenda in that area for the next generation.
- A positive and realistic framework on financing for development – the Addis Ababa Action Agenda – was agreed on at the *Third International Conference on Financing for Development* hosted by Ethiopia in July.
- *Climate change COP21* will be held in Paris at the end of the year, and a new global agreement is due to be reached there.

Taken together, these four agreements will guide global sustainable development priorities for a generation. The SDGs in particular were developed in a very inclusive manner. Governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, academic and research institutions, NGOs, and multilateral organizations mobilized their networks and got involved.

In the *Asia-Pacific* region:

- 3.5 million people in Asia participated in the MyWorld Survey sponsored by the UN development system which asked people about their priorities for the new agenda.

- Seven ASEAN member countries worked with the UN development system to hold national consultations on the new development agenda.
- Led by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) and with the support of the UN Country Team, Malaysia held its consultations in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. 8,000 Malaysians were engaged in face-to-face and online discussions.
- ASEAN countries played a full part in the Member State processes at the United Nations where the new agenda was proposed by an Open Working Group and then negotiated by all Member States.

Three years of public information sharing and outreach and extensive discussions and negotiations by UN Member States have helped ensure that the new agenda is relevant to the challenges of our times, including by addressing:

- Persistent *inequalities* and ongoing *discrimination*. One of the defining features of Agenda 2030 is to leave no-one behind. The rising tide should lift every boat.

While many countries in ASEAN made tremendous progress against the MDGs, significant inequalities persist in the region. People living in rural and remote areas and members of minority groups have often seen less progress than others. Gender remains a significant issue. Women still have less access than do men to decent work, opportunities, and participation in decision making.

- The *jobs deficit* and its implications, particularly for youth. Today's generation of adolescents and youth stands at 1.8 billion people – the largest our world has ever seen. Most of these young people live in developing countries. Their aspirations, energy, and innovation can bring a huge demographic dividend to countries. But the opposite is also true. A generation with many unemployed, alienated and/or disengaged youth is not a recipe for peace and harmony. Around our world, youth are disproportionately unemployed, and often lack access to quality and affordable services.

- Mounting *environmental challenges*, including climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and air, water, and soil pollution. Human survival and wellbeing depend heavily upon the health of our ecosystems. Their deterioration not only has serious environmental implications: it also undermines livelihoods, health, and food and water security.

- The impact of *natural disasters*. Asia is the most disaster-prone region in the world. Every country in ASEAN has been affected by major floods or other catastrophes in recent years, including Malaysia which experienced its worst floods in decades at the end of last year.

- Our old enemy: *conflict*. The UN has been largely successful in ending war between nations. But conflicts persist in the form of civil wars and asymmetrical warfare involving non-state actors. Building peaceful and inclusive societies as Agenda 2030 envisages must truly be a major priority.

All these issues – inequalities, jobs, environmental challenges, natural disasters, and achieving the peace required for development are central to the new global agenda.

What will drive the global sustainable development agenda?

Without doubt, broad-based, inclusive, and sustainable growth is critical for achieving Agenda 2030.

Asia has been a major engine of economic growth for many years now. Agenda 2030 – like the post 2015 Community Vision ASEAN is developing - is an agenda for shared prosperity. Advancing that means focusing not just on the *rate* of economic growth, but also on its *quality*. Economic performance needs to translate more consistently into inclusive and sustainable growth which reduces poverty and inequality without degrading the environment.

In pursuing people-centred development, the following factors are relevant:

- *Leaving no one behind* will require identifying and then addressing deep-rooted determinants of exclusion. Tackling entrenched inequalities relating to gender, ethnicity, and other factors will require proactive policies and investments across education, skills training, sexual and reproductive health services, social protection, availability of credit – and in all other services which widen opportunity. It will mean committing to inclusion of all peoples.

- Many trillions of dollars will be spent on *infrastructure* between now and 2030. It is important that that development is *risk informed* – to avoid setbacks in the event of major shocks, including those being exacerbated by climate change. Risks need to be understood and planned around. Disaster risk reduction needs to be pursued by effective institutions with the capacity to lead complex, long-running processes, and be designed and implemented with full community engagement.

- Innovations and improvements in *governance* will be needed at every level. There is capacity to be built. Sweeping policy, legislative, and regulatory changes are going to be needed for sustainable development. Whole of government approaches are needed across economic, social, and environmental decision making.

· That means that development actors of all kinds will need to work *collaboratively* across the range of inter-linked Sustainable Development Goals. Agenda 2030 requires broad coalitions to be formed: of governments - national and local, multilateral and regional organizations, civil society, NGOs, academic and research organizations, and the private sector.

Major multi-stakeholder meetings, like the Global Transformation Forum taking place in Kuala Lumpur, this week are important in providing a space for dialogue around what it will take to transform development prospects.

· *How business does business* will have a significant impact on whether the SDGs can be achieved. There are countless opportunities for the private sector to engage with the new global agenda through inclusive business models and environmentally friendly ways of operating. Take for example:

- *The Sustainable Palm Oil Initiative.* Vast areas of tropical forest have been cleared for palm oil production over the years, not least in ASEAN countries. Now, however, up to ninety per cent of the buying power of palm oil is estimated to be signing up to deforestation-free supply chains. The aim is to expand this successful approach into other areas of commodity production.

- *The Philippines Financial Freedom Campaign,* backed by a government, private sector, and UNDP partnership, which is boosting entrepreneurship among Filipino recipients of remittances. This initiative of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), Western Union, and UNDP is engaging an average of 700,000 to 900,000 Facebook users weekly and supports inclusive growth.

· Agenda 2030's emphasis on *accountability* requires that governments and development actors alike pay much more attention to producing better quality data and knowledge, and to engaging people and groups from all walks of life in implementing and monitoring the goals.

Thus there have been many calls for a "*data revolution*" to accompany implementation of the SDGs. Capacities to analyse data are needed for policymaking, for scrutiny by parliaments, for monitoring by citizens and media, and for empowering citizens as agents of their own development.

Financing achievement of Agenda 2030

Big ambitions require big investments. The UN Conference on Trade and Development (*UNCTAD*) estimates that total investment needs in developing countries in key sectors like food and nutrition, water, sanitation, and health over the lifetime of the SDGs range from \$3.3 to \$4.5 trillion per year. Based on today's

level of public and private investment, developing countries would need to bridge an annual funding shortfall of between \$1.9 and \$3.1 trillion.

It is clear that public finance alone could come nowhere near meeting the total financing needs for the transition to inclusive, low-emission, and climate-resilient development called for in Agenda 2030.

Drawing on *all* forms of finance – public and private, domestic and international – will be essential for this task – each can be complementary and mutually-reinforcing to the others. Synergies must be found with environment and climate finance and related mechanisms too.

The good news in the ASEAN region is that there are more resources and capabilities available to address development challenges available than ever before.

Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) which totaled \$10 billion in ASEAN countries in 2013 will remain important for Least Developed Countries which struggle to raise domestic revenue and attract private finance.

As ODA is limited, however, a critical challenge is to ensure that it is used in the best possible ways, with the aim of catalyzing finance from other sources.

Domestic private capital accumulation and public spending are both showing strong upward trends in ASEAN countries. Net government expenditure is on average nearly 25 per cent of GDP in the region.

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda agreed at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in July recognized the importance of innovative financing mechanisms for sustainable development. These could include impact investing, and financing mechanisms like green bonds which combine public and private resources.

Islamic finance has an important role to play too. With its concern for financial stability, financial inclusion, and shared prosperity, Islamic finance can make significant contributions across the 2030 Agenda. Islamic financial instruments like Sukuk are well suited to making investments in sustainable infrastructure, while insurance concepts like Takful can promote social solidarity and financial inclusion.

Several ASEAN countries are already establishing frameworks for financing the SDGs.

· *Vietnam*, with UNDP support in 2014, undertook a *development finance assessment* to provide evidence and recommendations for strengthening the management of its sources of finance for sustainable development.

· The Governments of the *Philippines, Myanmar, and Lao PDR* are all in the process of implementing similar assessments. In the case of the Philippines, this is informing how to finance their Long Term Vision policy. In Lao PDR, the assessment is being used to inform the financing framework for their next five-year plan.

UNDP has supported *Indonesia and Thailand* to review their outward provision of development co-operation and financing. The governments of these two countries are among those determining how to promote more effective assistance within the ASEAN region. South-South and Triangular Co-operation within the region and beyond has a big role to play in advancing Agenda 2030. UNDP works actively alongside South-South and Triangular Co-operation. We have entered a number of strategic partnerships with emerging economies in support of that, and would welcome reaching more such agreements with middle income countries.

UN support for SDG implementation

UNDP and the whole of the UN development system are committed to working with ASEAN member countries to implement the 2030 Agenda:

· Our approach to support for countries on implementation is called '*MAPS*', which stands for mainstreaming, acceleration, and policy support.

Mainstreaming refers to the support we can give governments as they incorporate the agenda in their national and local strategies, plans, and budgets, and strengthen their data systems.

On *acceleration*, we can help identify the obstacles and bottlenecks in the way of making progress on goals and targets, and to identify actions which could speed up progress on multiple targets at the same time. In this, we will draw on many successful examples from the use of a specific MDG acceleration tool in more than fifty countries in recent years.

On *policy support*, we can provide co-ordinated and demand-driven advice, and technical assistance, drawing on the great depth and breadth of knowledge and programme experience gained across the UN over many decades.

Across the three components of MAPS, we will seek to build and facilitate partnerships, improve data, and deepen accountability.

· UNDP will also support national SDG reporting, as it did for the MDGs. Together with our partners in the UN development system, we are currently preparing guidelines for national SDG reports.

. We will support global and local advocacy around the SDGs, and promote broad engagement in implementation and in monitoring progress. The UN Millennium Campaign will evolve into a dynamic new campaign, and support promotion of the SDGs at country level and globally.

Conclusion

The transformation of our world for which the 2030 Agenda calls is a tall order. But we all appreciate what it will mean for the well-being of people, especially the hundreds of millions of people who continue to live in extreme poverty, and for the prospects of the one planet on which we all depend.

Now is the time to take the actions needed to secure a more peaceful, prosperous, and stable future for both people and planet. At UNDP we look forward to close collaboration with all partners in ASEAN on implementation of Agenda 2030, and on supporting ASEAN's post 2015 Community Vision.