Securing a Bright Future for Vulnerable Countries
Editorial

Sustainable Development Goals are Crucial for Transformation of Vulnerable Countries

By UN-OHRLLS High Representative Gyan Chandra Acharya

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Sustainable Development Goals are Crucial for Transformation of Vulnerable Countries

Gyan Chandra Acharya, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States talks to The Commitment

The Commitment  What is your view on the recently agreed new global sustainable development agenda for 2030?

Gyan Chandra Acharya  This is an historic agreement arrived at by the member states in the 70th year of the founding of the United Nations. For the first time in human history, we have a firm date for eradicating poverty and a coherent and integrated sustainable development framework that combines social, economic and environmental sustainability in a holistic manner. These aspirations are backed by means of implementation and multi-stakeholder approach — all clearly spelt out and firmly embedded in goals and targets. This has been a very inclusive process with a focus on transformation and leaving no one behind.

Collectively, it is therefore a paradigm shift in our thinking, approach, strategy and implementation of a global development vision.

TC  Given the challenges of the MDGs, how do you think the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will impact the world’s most vulnerable countries?

GCA  Let me stress here that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were a very important international commitment to focus on human development in developing countries. They energized the whole world in focusing resources and strategies on fundamental human development goals. As a result, tremendous progress was made in all countries including in the vulnerable countries. But the progress remained mixed in these countries, given their low base, complexity of multiple challenges and capacity constraints.

The SDGs are crucial for the vulnerable countries, especially now that we have the experience of MDGs’ successes and challenges. SDGs go far beyond MDGs. Besides the human development side, they have a strong focus on key drivers of growth such as economic transformation, infrastructure, energy, and ICT. Similarly, the goals equally focus on protecting natural resources, sustainable patterns of production and consumption and climate change. Moreover, means of implementation and a multi-stakeholder approach are clearly spelt out alongside the value of peaceful and inclusive societies and accountable and effective institutions.

I have always believed that the principle of equity, and the creation of a peaceful, secure, stable and just global community demand that we attach the highest priority to those who lack capacity to achieve these goals on their own, given their peculiar constraints and high degree of vulnerabilities.

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– Gyan Chandra Acharya  High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
How can the SDGs be fully realized by the vulnerable countries?

Adopting the right vision is key, but implementation is what makes all the difference. In Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the capacity and resources to create a right integrated strategy together with implementation mechanisms are limited, when they have to deal with the intertwined challenges of poverty eradication, inclusive and rapid economic growth and environmental sustainability and structural vulnerability in a cohesive manner.

The SDGs are so comprehensive and holistic that they need first of all an integrated vision and development strategy at the national level to implement them. Domestic resource base needs to be strengthened and widened. These steps alone will not be sufficient. It is equally important that the global community steps up to the plate. Undertaking the investments needed to steer the most vulnerable countries towards sustainable development will require that traditional sources of finance such as Official Development Assistance (ODA), market access and technical assistance be scaled up and targeted more clearly. New sources such as public private partnerships, leveraging of private sector resources, access to science and technology and innovative sources of financing should be fully utilized. Robust monitoring and follow up at the national, regional and global levels will be critical.

What are the most important goals for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States?

People living in the world’s vulnerable countries should benefit from the SDGs, so in that sense, all of the 17 goals are important. There are the general goals which are most important such as poverty eradication and tackling hunger and sustainable agriculture development, gender equality, health, education and access to water and energy.

There is also a clear focus on economic growth, infrastructure development and industrialization, jobs, cities which will have a direct bearing on utilizing their strong economic resources. Furthermore, protection of biodiversity, oceans and seas, climate change and sustainable production and consumption patterns are very important issues to them. There are also many targets which are specific to each group of vulnerable countries. But most important for them is the means of implementation and strengthened and enhanced global partnerships.

The Third International Conference on Financing for Development concluded in Addis Ababa on a positive note and the recently finalized SDGs are in the process of adoption by world leaders in September. Do you expect a favorable outcome at the climate summit in Paris?

We are in the middle of a momentous year. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda is a forward looking and comprehensive document that has laid a strong foundation for a new global partnership for sustainable development with a multi stakeholder approach.

Similarly, the conclusion of long and inclusive deliberations on the new global sustainable development agenda is yet another good sign of a unified visionary outlook of the global community towards a better future for people and planet together. Therefore, we believe that the international community will continue on this course, as it prepares for a climate agreement in Paris. The need to address climate change is urgent. I believe that Paris can deliver for the vulnerable countries as well. It will require bold steps and strong commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Adequate and predictable financial support and capacity building for the most vulnerable countries is key. We should not miss this opportunity to set our course right.

Looking beyond 2015, what do you see as the main priorities for vulnerable countries next year?

My hope is that we can step into 2016 with positive agreements on a collective vision of the world and a strong commitment to look forward to a better future in a spirit of new global partnerships. Countries will start the process of implementation through the integration of the global agreements on the ground at the national and subnational levels. My office will continue to work with the country groups through our advocacy and support to effectively implement their respective Programs of Action while also ensuring coherence with the global processes. Just this year, we have held several ministerial and high-level consultative meetings, as well as many briefings and discussions among the vulnerable country groups on the global processes. Naturally, we will continue and build on these actions well beyond this extraordinary year.
A new OHRLLS campaign is highlighting the achievements of least developed countries and celebrating their successes. The Least Not Last campaign highlights where least developed countries have been at the forefront of change and promotes these countries as a priority for the international community in 2015 and beyond.

The campaign is running on social media and submissions of ideas are welcome under the hashtag #LeastNotLast. Follow the campaign on Twitter @UNOHRLLS and Facebook: www.facebook.com/UNOHRLLS

Sustainable Development Goals agreed upon....

"We all recognized that we have to reach out and change the way the world does business, so that we never again move in the direction of people being left behind irrespective of colour or creed or any other status for that matter. The nations of the world ought to be proud of themselves that every country, bar none, and all civil society were in a room for 3 years working on Sustainable Development Goals and subsequently working on the Agenda that we know will give new life to the United Nations, will give new life to multilateralism and benefit this world and humanity."

- Ambassador Macharia Kamau of Kenya
co-facilitator of negotiations
INTERVIEW

Least Developed Countries Transitioning to Sustainable Development Goals

Ambassador Abdul Momen, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN talks to Nosh Nalavala

Nosh Nalavala Do you foresee a successful road to the SDGs for Least Developed Countries (LDCs)?

Ambassador Abdul Momen

The goal is pro-people, pro planet, more equitable and a more inclusive sustainable world for all — no one is left behind. LDCs depend on Official Development Assistance (ODA), the main source of funding. They will need much more funding.

NN With a $100 billion dollars fund for SGDs, will most of it go to the LDCs?

AM We have been arguing that half should go to the LDCs. Even the countries who are part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development are in agreement. These are good beginnings. Unless the LDCs get additional funding, even the goal of technology transfer, unless it is at affordable prices, will not be realized.

NN Talking of technology transfer, is there a lot of South-South cooperation? And is there progress towards North-South cooperation?

AM Yes, the countries of the South are becoming more dominant with investible funds; one third of the total investible funds are in the South. Even trade is on the increase and there is a lot of potential in South-South cooperation. A lot of issues are now being brought onto a multilateral forum and there is tremendous scope for partnership. The essence of sustainable development goals is to “work in partnership.”

NN As the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) get phased out this year, Bangladesh is on track in achieving those targets in a number of areas. Where do you see a shortfall in MDGs and how are you transitioning to the SDGs?

AM Bangladesh, has, despite limited resources, achieved most of the MDGs. We did pretty well with poverty reduction. In 1991 we had 59% living below the poverty line at $1.25 a day, but today 22% are living below the poverty line. At the same time we have gender parity of about 53%. So out of the eight MDGs we achieved six goals.

NN So where was the shortfall in the MDGs?

AM We are afraid that if there is a disaster many of our achievements would be washed away. In the coastal areas the water levels are increasing and while we have achieved near sufficiency in food and agriculture, a large proportion off our population in the South are vulnerable to sea level rise. Nearly 25% of our land would be lost. We have not had a severe impact of climate change for the last six years, but looking at the climate change trends, we are concerned. At this time our focus is on resiliency and sustainability.

NN So where do you think the SDGs will fill the gap?

AM The SDGs have 17 goals. These are basically building blocks from MDGs to SDGs. If you look at the LDC list, only 16 countries could achieve the MDGs. Out of 32 LDCs in Africa, only four could fulfill the poverty reduction goal. In the area of sanitation, only five could achieve it. MDGs are an unfinished agenda.
In Zambia, UN Forum Urges Faster Development Action for Landlocked Developing Nations

A conference aimed at accelerating an ambitious development plan for the world’s 32 Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) met in Zambia in June, resulting in a global ‘Call to Action’ intended to streamline the LLDCs’ path towards sustainable, inclusive and economic progress.

The three-day high-level meeting, held in Livingstone and co-organised by Zambia and OHRLLS, built on the successes of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA), in which Member States outlined a 10-year blueprint for the development of LLDCs based on overcoming challenges related to landlockedness, remoteness and geographical disadvantages.

“The Livingstone meeting was critical in highlighting the importance of the effective implementation of the VPoA in partnership with transit countries and development partners,” said the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Gyan Chandra Acharya. “Enhanced and strengthened multi-stakeholder partnerships will be indispensable for turning landlocked countries into landlinked countries. This is what came out strongly in the high-level meeting.”

The Livingstone Call to Action urges Member States to pursue “several concrete measures to catalyse the implementation of the six priorities,” including the adoption of steps to enhance the structural economic transformation in the LLDCs and improving their share of international trade through policy measures.

Celebrating the Call to Action as a “clear” call for implementation of development goals for the LLDCs, the Chair of the Group of LLDCs, Yamfwa Mukanga, urged the international community to ramp up efforts to ensure that the momentum of the VPoA is maintained in the coming months.

AMBASSADOR DR. MWABA P. KASESE-BOTA, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zambia to the United Nations calls on partners to deliver on commitments:

“The MDGs were fewer in number compared to the number of SDGs which are now double in number, and have 169 targets. The ambition is certainly high and so is the challenge to meet the increased mandate of the new goals and targets in terms of implementation and follow up. Countries like Zambia will further need to integrate the Post 2015 Development Agenda, the Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries and the Vienna Program of Action for LLDCs, so as to reduce on the overheads for the three processes as well as to effectively enhance attribution and reporting for all three processes through a single mechanism. The success of this process will require delivering on commitments by partners to support in terms of ODA, technical and capacity support to the three programmes of the Post 2015 Development Agenda.”
New Global Business Network for Small Islands

by Malwina Buldys

A new online network for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) launches in September. The network aims to link SIDS to the private sector, global businesses and other stakeholders at the national, regional, interregional and international level.

The SIDS Global Business Network was formulated at a Private Sector Partnerships Forum which OHRLLS co-hosted on the side-lines of last year’s Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. It is anticipated that the website will help to set up a network between SIDS and business opportunities, serving as a mediator through which members can interact, gather and share business methodologies and plans. Hosted by OHRLLS, the site combines social networking, advertising, marketing and links to relevant international organisations.

Due to a limited land mass, vulnerabilities to a global climate change, and geographical isolation, SIDS face unique challenges that create a host of pressures on their natural ecosystems. Yet these predicaments can also leverage opportunities to promote the sustainable development of island communities. It is hoped that the new facility will help to develop successful partnerships between Small Island Developing States who are already starting to establish initiatives with the private sector. One example of this is the South Pacific Destination Alliance, an initiative that mediates relations between leaders of local business communities, NGOs, and local governments and helps to accommodate the development of regionally-suitable solutions that consider tourism a valuable tool for change. Further information on the network will be available on the OHRLLS website at the end of September.
Earlier this year in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, world leaders met at a landmark event in development as Governments adopted a global framework for financing sustainable development. The Third International Conference on Financing held a series of events leading to the “Addis Ababa Action Agenda” and an agreement on climate change by the end of the year.

Calling it a “pivotal moment” and addressing a high-level meeting on Global Partnerships for a Transformative Agenda for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Gyan Chandra Acharya, High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States said, “The Sustainable Development Goals will succeed only when we take care of the interests and needs of LDCs, where the incidence of poverty is highest and the vulnerabilities are deep rooted and multidimensional, gains in these countries could have large scale impacts.”

Calling on partners to “fulfill the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals”, Mr. Acharya stated, “To meet the investment needs of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) . . . the global community needs to move the discussion from “Billions” in Official Development Assistance to “Trillions” in investments of all kinds.”

“LDCs have the deepest levels of poverty. Out of about 950 million people, around 45 per cent of them are still living in extreme poverty, despite a global average of only about 14 per cent”.

The official declaration on LDCs underscored the importance of mobilizing resources from a variety of sources, which should be additional to ODA, and disbursed in a manner that respects the priorities and special needs of LDCs.

At a Special Event on Financing for Infrastructure Development for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), co-organized by OHRLLS and the Government of Zambia, participants drew international attention to the need for additional resources to support the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014 – 2024. The event featured methodology to enhance mobilization of financing for development of the Landlocked Developing Countries, especially for infrastructure development and regional integration.

AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BENIN, JEAN-FRANCIS RÉGIS ZINSOU, calls on the international community to support LDCs:

“To fulfill the unfinished business of MDGs, to build infrastructure, energy and productive capacity, and to promote environmental sustainability and withstand the impacts of climate change, LDCs need a comprehensive resource package in an unprecedented manner.

It is true that development is first and foremost the responsibility of nations themselves, but in a globalized world and with capacity and resource constraints for sustainable development of LDCs, it is indeed a global responsibility.”
INTERVIEW

Global Partnerships Key to Sustainable Development Goal Success

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Belize to the UN and vice-chair of AOSIS, Ms. Lois Michele Young talks to Nosh Nalavala

Nosh Nalavala  As co-chair of AOSIS what steps do you recommend your members take towards capacity building within the new sustainability framework?

Lois Michele Young  We advocate global partnerships towards capacity building. The Samoa conference was very focused on global partnerships and a shared vision; an acceptable sharing of obligations between developed and developing countries. Including North-South, South-South and Triangular cooperation.

NN  To what extent do the AOSIS countries visualize the road to success with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

LMY  We see success with the SDGs because it has a big focus on “means of implementation”. There is an added focus on global partnerships in the SDGs and there is an ongoing debate about means of implementation in the Post-2015 agenda that would be wider in scope and encompass many of the Millennium Development Goals. There is a renewed commitment by the international community with an emphasis on global partnerships and that will help us in our eventual success.

NN  Would funding from the Global Climate Fund for AOSIS members be used for adaptation and mitigation or for other areas as well?

LMY  We are now pressing for funds for “loss and damage” as a result of the damage already done, like ocean acidification. Unfortunately, this has not got traction with our partners, but it’s a huge issue for us as members when we see that damage has been done by developed countries enabling them to reach their level of development at our expense.

NN  Is the voice of AOSIS being heard in the climate talks?

LMY  Yes, we make the statements and I believe that we are being heard, but the negotiating structure is not perfect. AOSIS negotiations go through the G-77, so we have to depend on them.

NN  Do you feel that Belize is getting its fair share of support within the Caribbean countries?

LMY  Yes, Belize gets financial assistance from different sources, including the European Union. That aid is towards the fulfillment of our two goals: poverty reduction and governance. Recently the UN Secretary-General met with heads of CARICOM and adopted a declaration about climate change.

Ms. Lois Michele Young of the Permanent Mission of Belize to the UN and vice chair of AOSIS.

Rick Bajornas / UN Photo

Ms. Lois Michele Young of the Permanent Mission of Belize to the UN and vice chair of AOSIS.

Rick Bajornas / UN Photo
INTERVIEW

Sustainable Development Goals Must be Universal

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Paraguay to the UN, Mr. Federico Alberto González Franco talks with Nosh Nalavala on the universal nature of SDGs

Nosh Nalavala  What role do you foresee Paraguay playing towards the implementation of the SDGs?

Federico Alberto González Franco  Paraguay is a Landlocked Developing Country (LLDC) and we have always emphasized that the sustainable development goals, under the umbrella of the UN, must include our ideals: universality and improvement for all. We want to make sure that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include everyone — developing and developed countries, but also those countries with special needs and challenges.

Several Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are in the LLDCs group and we work together. We share all our resources and are willing to work together to achieve the sustainable development goals. Paraguay has played a leading role since 2003. We are the coordinators and chairman of the LLDCs in Geneva and in New York Paraguay is the vice chair of the LLDCs group. As an LLDC we have our constraints. For example, to send out any product by sea, we pay nearly 40% more. We suffer not only on trade but also on social and economic issues because of our landlockedness.

NN  How did you fare with the MDGs?

FAGF  It was a challenge for all LLDCs. We succeeded in education and access to public health, sanitation and water. We were able to reduce poverty. However, our landlockedness has created social and economic problems. We now have a National Development Plan. Our Plan is the basis for negotiations on SDGs and climate change.

NN  More Paraguayans are enjoying better access to education and health care and an increasing number of families are gaining access to clean water and sanitation. What areas will you focus on towards successfully achieving the SDGs?

FAGF  We will continue to focus on these issues because we are not there yet. We also include civil society, people with special needs and indigenous people.

I must again emphasize universality. SDGs must be universal. We are the only country in South America with two official languages: Spanish and an indigenous language, Guarani. Indigenous welfare is a priority of our government.

NN  Are you optimistic that LLDCs members will get funding towards mitigation and adaptation efforts?

FAGF  Yes I am. We are landlocked and have also suffered from excessive rain and an assault on our ecosystem. We too are suffering from the impact of climate change. The Almaty Program of Action did not deal with these issues, but now we are actively negotiating on these environmental issues with all the stakeholders and are securing financing towards the alleviation of the impact of climate change.

NN  Do you see the Paris climate conference in December adopting a meaningful, universal agreement to tackle climate change?

FAGF  Participants must realize that this is the last opportunity they have. All of us will need to be responsible. I have talked to most of my colleagues at the UN and they are willing to compromise. I’m optimistic that something good will come out of the Paris Summit.
Ministers from the least developed countries (LDCs) in Africa met in Milan in June 2015 and pledged to draw on their countries' great potential to boost growth and lock in sustainable development.

At the Ministerial Meeting co-organized by the Government of Italy and the UN-OHRLLS high-level participants discussed ways in which inclusive economic growth can be accelerated, thus contributing to sustainable development.

Government representatives from 29 countries as well as experts, including from the United Nations system and other international organizations, think tanks and the private sector, stressed the key drivers of "graduation" from the LDCs category. This included enhancing capacity to produce products and services, the importance of good governance, food security, access to modern energy and infrastructure development.

The meeting was held on the margins of the Expo Milano 2015, the universal exhibition that Italy is hosting from May to October 2015 on the theme Feeding the Planet – Energy for Life.

In a Ministerial declaration, participants underscored that it is essential that commitments to overseas development assistance are met, in addition to enhancing investment promotion, market access and access to technology. For development to be rapid and sustainable, they also stressed stronger national ownership and leadership.

“We must ensure sufficient resources to facilitate needed infrastructure development to foster resilient communities and empower poor and marginalized rural households for inclusive and sustainable development in the LDCs” said High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Gyan Chandra Acharya.