



United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

(UN-OHRLLS)

Statement by

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu,

High Representative and Under-Secretary-General for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

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Excellencies, Director General Tandin, members of the faculty, and my warmest welcome to you - dear students.

Director General Tandin,

Thank you for your very warm welcome here at the nation's premier centre of excellence on development management and policy research.

It is my sincere pleasure and privilege to spend a moment with you and your students. Over the last two days, I have had the honour of meeting and exchanging views with your nation's leaders. And I want to add, I have had a few brief moments to admire the breath taking beauty of your country and the kindness of your people.

Your country's people-centered development path, your efforts to reconcile human and natural capital toward a truly sustainable development path, and your continued progress are inspirational.

You give us much food for thought. This ranges from Bhutan's leadership to remain carbon neutral for all time and your status as a carbon negative country to the Gross National Happiness approach you have introduced.

We live in times where thinking "out of the box " is more than ever required, we live in times where leaving no one behind is ever more critical, we live in times of extra-ordinary technological progress and yet too many lives live in war, poverty and experience every day consequences of disasters with little hope for their futures.

This is not acceptable.

You have shown us what a willingness to " think of out of the box " looks like and can achieve within and beyond your borders.

Initially, people elsewhere thought the idea of a gross national happiness approach to development rather quaint and unreal. Now the idea of GNH is being embraced in various parts of the world in a search for a better and more sustainable way to manage affairs ranging from the protection of the environment to worker participation in companies and from organic farming and corporate social responsibility to government purchasing policies.

Indeed, the commitment of the Royal Government to achieve the goals of sustainable development for all is inspiring. I am therefore also not surprised to

see Bhutan so actively involved in the United Nations forthcoming high level political forum on “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies “.

So, I am very happy to find myself with a young audience committed to taking up the challenges of the future by learning what it takes to translate words to action and learning how to develop a body of policies that, if well managed, are to the benefit of inclusive and sustainable living for all.

How do we at the United Nations and specifically OHRLLS come into this equation?

First of all, allow me to say a few words on what my office does.

There are two critical functions I wish to highlight. First, the function of voice, of advocating for 91 most vulnerable countries around the world, totalling over 1.1 billion people. These countries comprise the Least Developed Countries, the Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

All are countries facing complex if not unique development challenges due to structural and geographical challenges.

The 193 members of the United Nations recognise this and have negotiated dedicated Programmes of Action for each group closely interlinked with the Sustainable Development Goals. For the landlocked least developed countries, these are the Istanbul and the Vienna Programme of Action and their goals apply to Bhutan.

Second, OHRLLS is called on to mobilize and coordinate UN-system capacities and international support for the effective implementation of the Istanbul and the Vienna Programme of Action, and the SDGs.

To do that, OHRLLS engages inter alia in applied policy research and provides substantive support to member countries for their effective participation in global inter-governmental negotiations.

While the Vienna and Istanbul programmes preceded the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its interlinked 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the priorities of the Istanbul and Vienna Programmes of Action are an integral part of the SDGs.

Agenda 2030 is probably the most comprehensive, most forward-looking but also the most complex blueprint ever adopted by the international community for a peaceful, inclusive and sustainable future. In that sense, Agenda 2030 together

with the Paris Climate Agreement are key building blocks for a new development paradigm.

Business as usual is no longer an option!

It was in September 2015 that the leaders of 193 countries agreed to achieve these 17 interlinked Sustainable Development Goals. The goals are global in nature and universally applicable.

You may think this is rather ordinary. Bringing together 193 nations to share such universal, forward looking agenda in our quite complex multi-lateral setting represented a big step forward if not the most ambitious, people-centered and planet-sensitive set of goals and targets for development ever conceived by the United Nations.

Agenda 2030 is truly about charting a comprehensive course of action and impact for all of humanity.

Now, just like in regular life, an initial and critical step is commitment. But once we have committed we must move to action or as we say implementation.

It's almost like we got engaged, married and now we have to make the marriage work!

Our ultimate test by 2030 is: what has it changed for people and have we been able to leave no one behind?

You, the youth of Bhutan, the youth of the world is called on to be critical agents of change in this, live by the values of the SDGs, and translate the ambitious global vision into local reality.

Governments, local communities and young people like yourselves are critical in turning the Sustainable Development Goals from a global vision into a local reality. In every country, achieving the SDGs requires young people to work together to put the Goals into action.

As students of policy and management, you are confronted in your work with how to formulate substantive policies which are responsive to the inter-related nature of issues, responsive to goals set by and for society and then how to put in place effective and efficient management frameworks facilitating achievement of policy objectives.

I am sure you all realize that this is easier said than done.

So, today I want to share with you a few thoughts on what it may take to move commitment to reality.

First, and like for all policy and managerial action work, it requires a good understanding of what the 17 SDGs and their targets are and especially how they are inter-related and what synergies exist between them.

You can find out about all of the goals and targets on the dedicated United Nations knowledge platform for the SDGs which is:

sustainabledevelopment.un.org

I only have time to highlight a couple of the SDGs and show key linkages. Then I wish to share a few thoughts on what it takes, in my own experience, to move the Agenda into reality.

We all know how our access to water, energy, health and education and having enough to eat are basic needs.

We all also know how infrastructure affects your ability to take a bus travelling on a safe road may make all the difference in having a job, going to school and getting an education.

We also all know how having electricity allowing you to study at night or, for some of you, recharging your phones or PC are critical to work and studying.

We all also know if social disruptions in a society keep widening, peace and harmony are threatened and how we must therefore ensure to include all women and men, girls and boys with equal rights in society.

We also all know the saying of “ think globally and act locally “.

The SDGs respond to the fact that extreme poverty continues to exist- eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge. And too many are still left out from having access to these “ basic needs “ and above all the hope to build better and more sustainable lives.

Thus the first Goal is to End Extreme Poverty in all forms by 2030. Yes, it’s an ambitious goal— but we believe it can be done. And all the other 16 Goals are dependent on how successful we are ending extreme poverty. It is the indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

Goal 2, for example, is on Zero Hunger: This Goal is about a world where everyone has access to sufficient and nutritious food all year round. Hunger is a barrier to education, a major cost factor in health services and so in turn a barrier to steady employment, health, social and economic growth. We can end hunger and malnutrition by promoting sustainable agriculture, supporting small farmers, and improving access to food and lowering the cost.

I am sure you all have heard, for example, how now your country is so close to taking over the school-feeding programme from WFP. And why is school feeding done? First it had to do with enhancing enrolment rates and now it is about more focus on nutritional status. Nutritional status is key in brain development and learning.

Goal 4 concerns Quality Education- Without education, there's little hope for transformation and typically the cycle of poverty continues from one generation to the next. I would not stand before you today if I had not had a chance to access quality education.

There has been great progress on the goal to provide primary education to all children worldwide. The key challenge is to raise the quality of education and enrolment rates for lower secondary education and for upper secondary education.

Goal 5 addresses the overarching means of Gender Equality - As was famously said at the Beijing Conference "women's rights are human rights"! The full inclusion and equal participation of women and girls in all aspects of a society's life are proven to be a key driver in sustainable development. We can not afford to lose half of humanity!

Goal 6 is on Clean Water and Sanitation: Today, 663 million people are still without access to safe drinking water sources. Each day, nearly 1,000 children die due to preventable water and sanitation-related diseases. Everyone on earth should have access to safe and affordable drinking water. That's the goal for 2030.

Goal 7 is about Affordable and Clean Energy - I have just attended a meeting in Bangkok on this issue. Imagine what it is like if you need to bring a candle to your health clinic to give birth. Today still too many women die in childbirth for the simple fact of inadequate health care infrastructure and that includes energy access. Imagine if you have no access to electricity but you are a very driven student who wants to access e-learning courses from other countries. You simply cannot do it without energy and so you will be left behind.

Goal 13 concerns Climate change one of the most urgent challenges of our time. Every country in the world is seeing the drastic effects of more intense storms, more droughts, rising sea levels, melting ice sheets and more extremes than ever before. Bhutan's leadership on climate change is well recognised but I understand Bhutan is no stranger to glacial lake outburst floods.

Therefore, the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals as it provides us with a roadmap for climate actions to build climate resilience including for vulnerable countries.

You can build the most wonderful road but if it gets washed out by rising ocean levels or flood bursts, the effort was in vain!

So, this describes a couple of key SDGs and to show their synergies and linkages.

There is a goal of specific interest no doubt to a student of policy and management.

This is Goal 16 on Peace Justice and Strong Institutions. Again, it is an overarching goal. Many countries are plagued by armed conflict, crime, torture and exploitation, all of which at best hinders development or at worst destroys efforts. This goal aims to reduce all forms of violence and propose that governments and communities find lasting solutions to conflict and insecurity. That means inter alia accountable and strong institutions, participatory management, strengthening the rule of law, reducing the flow of illicit arms and bringing developing countries more into the center of institutions of global governance.

This now brings me to the question: how to get this done?

You as students of policy and management have this very question at the core of your studies. You are privileged to have access to the experience, knowledge and wisdom of your teachers and to learn what in many ways is the craft of “ moving beyond words and getting things Done. »

So, I will share with you three key observations which I consider critical in making our blueprint Agenda 2030 a reality.

One, the SDGs do require governments, private sector and civil society to work as partners and to do so beyond borders if we want to tackle the complexity of the SDGs through finding integrated approaches which are responsive to specific local contexts. The code words are partnerships, working together and thinking out of the box. This indeed cannot be business as usual nor the development paradigm of the past century.

Two, concerns finance and technology. Sustainable development is a long-term undertaking and not a one shot deal. Ministers of Finance will need to be at the helm in building a more responsive international finance system to incentivise sustainable investments. Fiscal incentives, innovative financing mechanisms together with public-private partnerships are key. Also, and I have said this repeatedly, we must look into streamlining finance access procedures for the least developed countries given their capacity constraints yet without compromising on accountability and transparency.

Three is a point close to my heart and it is about reaching out to the local level. Like you, I come from a small society, a geographically isolated and highly fragmented country with the difference of the country being an island country. Reaching out to, listening to local communities and their needs, truly localising the SDGs, harnessing local energy, knowledge and hope will be a key factor not just in moving the SDGs to action but also in how sustainable our efforts will be.

All this has ramifications on how the United Nations itself does business. The Secretary-General is undertaking a comprehensive reform of the UN development system to make it fit for purpose so that the United Nations is effective and efficient in its support to countries and their priorities around Agenda 2030 and the Paris Climate Agreement.

You as the youth of your country, as the youth of our shared planet are the future. You are the privileged youth getting the best of education. Privilege brings responsibility to give back but I know you are driven by a deep and noble desire to serve your country and to serve people. Humility, hard work, a never ceasing desire to listen, learn and DO are the hallmarks of public service.

You are not alone in this. The United Nations stands ready to join hands with you, as stated by the Secretary General of the UN. The appointment by the SG of a youth envoy is the clearest illustration of this commitment.

So, I thank you for your attention, I hope my few remarks have triggered some thoughts and I very much look forward to listening and exchanging views with you - some of you may even wish to be interns with us at OHRLLS!

TASHI DELEK.