



2017 Report of the Joint Media Project



Credits

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Preface

This Report of the Joint Media Project of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and the International Press Syndicate (INPS) Group is a compilation of independent and indepth news and analyses by IDN from April 2016 to March 2017. IDN-InDepthNews, online since 2009, is a flagship agency of the INPS Group and its partner, the Global Cooperation Council established in February 1983.

The articles in this complication appeared on www.indepthnews.net in the main category 'Sustainability' and on the INPS Group's thematic website 'SDGS fo All' - www.sdgsforall.net. These can be accessed free of charge 365 days a year.

2016-2017 is the first year of the INPS Group's media project with the SGI, a lay Buddhist organization with headquarters in Tokyo. But IDN has been a party to the previous joint projects April 2014-March 2015 and April 2015-March 2016 - on 'Education for Global Citizenship' and 'Fostering Global Citizenship' respectively - as the result of an agreement between the precursor of the International Press Syndicate (INPS) Japan and the SGI.

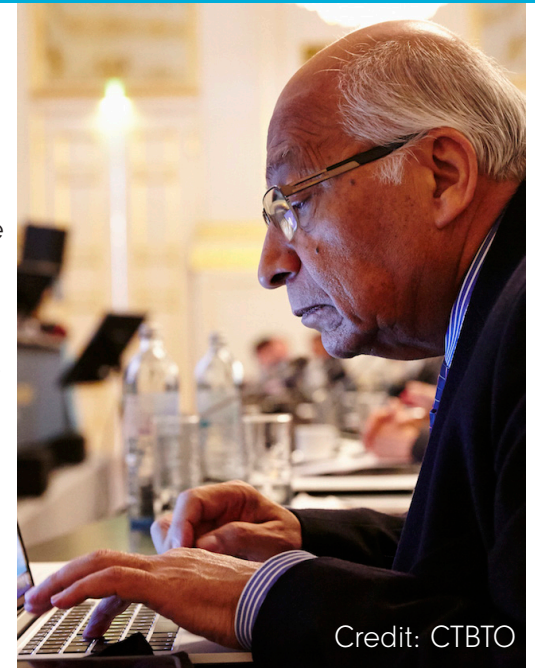
We are pleased that at the time of writing these lines, we are already in the second year of the INPS Group's 'SDGs for All' joint media project with the SGI. This compilation comprises 45 articles analyzing developments related to sustainable development on the whole and its 17 Goals with 169 targets at multiple levels - governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental. Some of the articles have been translated into Arabic, Swahili as well as several European and Asian languages.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit - officially came into force on January 2016. With these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, over the next fifteen years, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

The SDGs, also known as Global Goals, build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 Goals. Countries have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review of the progress made in implementing the Goals, which will require quality, accessible and timely data collection. Regional follow-up and review will be based on national-level analyses and contribute to follow-up and review at the global level.

I would like to avail of this opportunity to express my gratitude to the network of our correspondents around the world for their insightful contributions, the Project Director INPS Japan President Katsuhiko Asagiri for his valuable support in implementing the project, and the SGI for their trusted and professional partnership. Sincere thanks also to the UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova for taking the time to write a Foreword and Hiroki Nagano, Director of Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Affairs, Soka Gakkai International (SGI), for his message.



Credit: CTBTO

Ramesh Jaura
Director-General of the INPS Group and Editor-in-Chief of its flagship agency IDN.

Foreword



Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), charts a new vision for cooperation over the next 15 years, to ensure prosperity and well-being for all societies, while protecting the planet and strengthening peace. Inclusivity, integration, and universality. These are three hallmarks of the SDGs, and they represent the most ambitious and comprehensive agenda ever seen – to leave no one behind.

The new agenda is a paradigm shift at many levels, connecting all 17 SDGs and calling for cooperation in a universal manner, holding to account developed and developing countries alike and transcending the classic ‘development’ agenda, while taking forward a far-reaching vision of peace, just and effective governance.

One red thread woven all throughout the new agenda is that of information – to ensure all women and men, all societies have equal access to information, freedom of information, to be empowered with the skills and opportunities to create and share knowledge for the benefit of all.

In this regard, building on its unequalled experience in implementing projects to support free, independent and pluralistic media, UNESCO stands at the forefront of efforts to nurture and harness information as a catalyst for achieving the SDGs in their totality.

Equipped with this conviction, UNESCO joined forces with other UN agencies, as well as civil society organisations, to promote the adoption of SDG 16 on building peace, justice and effective institutions.

To understand the centrality of information across all of the SDGs, it might be easier to frame Goal 16 as a question – Is it possible to have sustainable peace without justice and without effective media institutions? The answer is, simply, no. The real question then becomes how can the international community strengthen the communications environment to reinforce peace and justice? For UNESCO, peace and sustainable development are inseparable.

Sustainable development assumes the presence of peace, justice and effective institutions. For UNESCO, free, independent and pluralistic media make for such effective institutions, which can guarantee transparency and accountability not only among the governing elites but also among other institutions in society, such as corporate bodies, and the like.

That is why UNESCO has so keenly supported the development of media-friendly indicators for measuring Goal 16. Indeed, following the adoption of the SDGs, an Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDGs developed a global framework of indicators where UNESCO played a key role here. The UN Statistical Commission subsequently adopted the indicators, which are now awaiting formal endorsement by the Economic and Social Council and the UN General Assembly. For its part, the UN Statistical Commission has meanwhile designated UNESCO as custodian agency for global reporting and monitoring of progress on Indicator 16.10.2, which measures national guarantees for public access to information. In addition, UNESCO is a contributing agency to SDG Indicator 16.10.1, which seeks to assess progress in protecting the safety of journalists and other human rights advocates.

Against this background, then, what role can free, independent and pluralistic media play in the realisation of peaceful societies as an underpinning for all the SDGs? It is evident that media play a central role in terms of providing critical information to the public.

Without media and information, it is hard to see how there can be progress in all the other aspects of sustainable development – such as in eradicating poverty, establishing gender equality, improving health, providing water and combatting climate change – all of which are preconditions for peace with justice.

UNESCO's advocacy for free, independent and pluralistic media as a reliable bulwark of information in societies does not occur in a vacuum. Over the years, UNESCO has synthesized lessons from its support to over 1700 media development projects in some 140 countries. Three things are clear.

First, there is empirical evidence to suggest that free, pluralistic and independent media play a catalytic role in national development monitoring and priority setting, as well as in enabling public participation in development and civic affairs.

Second, although media are threatened worldwide, either through repression, failing business models or sheer unprofessionalism, the international community recognises that unfettered media are an integral part of governance.

It is by design that the SDG indicator on public access to information is part of the governance agenda. This particular indicator links peace and security to the effectiveness of public institutions in delivering on their development mandates. Having a free, independent and pluralistic media system is an integral part of good governance and politics.

Third, there is broad consensus on the functions of a free, independent and pluralistic media system in relation to the normative discourse of sustainable development as participatory and emancipatory of individuals, groups, communities and societies.

In this respect, the international community has generally viewed free, independent and pluralistic media as part of the right to freedom of expression and the right to access information, as well as being key to development and democracy. This is true, for example, of the groundbreaking Windhoek Declaration on promoting a free, independent and pluralistic African press, as well as other international documents on this subject.

It is also reinforced by the annual declarations made at each World Press Freedom Day conference organised by UNESCO in partnership with its Member States.

It is against this background that we can affirm that information, disseminated through and by free, independent and pluralistic media, can make all the difference in translating the promise of all of the SDGs into reality. And I am confident that UNESCO's work in this area – alongside our work in education, water management, the ocean, science, technology and innovation, gender equality, and culture – is set to make a significant contribution to this objective.



Photo: UN Security Council underlines UNESCO's role in Preventing Violent Extremism | UNESCO

Message

Hiroki Nagano, Director of Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Affairs, Soka Gakkai International (SGI)

Due to the escalation in recent years of global challenges that pose a threat to human dignity – such as poverty, hunger and environmental destruction, as well as the issue of refugees – international society has begun to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in order to realize “The future we want.”

As implementation gets underway, I believe it is important to continuously affirm the key phrase underpinning these Goals, namely the pledge to ensure that “No one will be left behind.” In order to fulfil this pledge, there is a need to clarify which individuals are being left behind – children, the elderly, sexual minorities, people with disabilities, refugees and migrants and so on.

We of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) strongly believe that sharing awareness of and empowering these individuals – who represent the real faces behind the numerical data on current issues – will hold the key to the fulfilment of the SDGs. In his 2017 Peace Proposal, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda states the following: “If we are to make progress in the alleviation of poverty and toward the achievement of all of the 17 goals and 169 targets that comprise the SDGs, we will need to share a similar awareness and solidarity across all fields.”

In this context, I believe that the timely information and insightful analysis provided by International Press Syndicate (INPS) plays an extremely vital role in terms of showing exactly who is being left behind. The SGI, together with INPS, launched the “SDGs for All” website in April 2016, with the aim of cultivating greater interest in this topic, encouraging substantial discussion and action on a wider scale, and thereby increasing as much as possible the number of people who will stand up and take action for the achievement of the SDGs. As an international lay Buddhist organization engaged in social contribution, we find deep significance in being able to join forces with INPS in this way, and we express profound agreement with their reporting objectives and approach.

For many years, the SGI has engaged in educational activities to raise awareness in the field of sustainable development with a touring exhibition entitled “Seeds of Hope: Visions of sustainability, steps toward change” and the screening of the DVD “A Quiet Revolution.” In November 2016, we collaborated with the Earth Charter International to create a mobile App – Maping – to enable ordinary people, and in particular youth, to understand that the SDGs present an immediate challenge and to help them initiate action to achieve these shared Goals.

Dr. David Nabarro, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, stated the following during the presentation of the App at the United Nations Headquarters: “The SDGs are actually the plan for the future of the world and its people. The plan is like no other plan. ...This is a plan to keep the people prosperous, safe and secure, healthy and educated. It’s a plan to keep the planet in a fit state to look after not just us but many generations to come.”

The SGI intends to work proactively with INPS to facilitate the widespread use of the Maping App so that we can increase awareness about the children and youth who head the list of those who are most seriously affected by the various challenges outlined in the SDGs.

The SGI is deeply determined to continue striving – together with like-minded citizens and various groups across the world – to expand a grassroots movement aiming towards the creation of a future in which no one will be left behind. In order to achieve this objective, we anticipate that this SGI-INPS joint media project will be a valuable platform for raising awareness and provide vital information concerning the future of humanity.





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Exhibition Highlights the Power of Human Rights Education

By Ravi Kanth Devarakonda

GENEVA (IDN) - Several international civil society groups and governments have joined hands to highlight the power of human rights education in transforming lives. In commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, they launched an Exhibition on March 6 at the UN in Geneva.

The Exhibition to be displayed until March 17 “reiterates the vital role of human rights education and training in the promotion of dignity, equality and peace, and in the prevention of human rights violations and abuses” – in the face of the rising wave of xenophobia, bigotry, and intolerance.

The Exhibition is co-organized by Soka Gakkai International (SGI), Human Rights Education 2020 (HRE 2020), the NGO Working Group on Human Rights Education and Learning, and the states comprising the Platform for Human Rights and Training, “with thanks to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)”.

The 25-panel exhibition shows how human rights education has transformed the lives of people in Australia, Burkina Faso, Peru, Portugal and Turkey. It invites citizens, governments and civil society organizations to take action to nurture a culture of human rights.

At the opening, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations Office at Geneva, Ambassador Maria Nazareth Farani Azevedo said, human rights education and learning is critical for “achieving peace, tolerance, and sustainable development in the society”, particularly at a time of “increasing polarization, violence, and extremism”.

She was speaking on behalf of the nine governments involved in Platform for Human Rights Education and Learning. The nine governments are: Brazil, Costa Rica, Italy, Morocco, the Philippines, Senegal, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Thailand.

An escalating “rumble” from people all over the world is that “growing discrimination and abuse, joblessness and deprivation, inequality, and elite corruption,” will no longer be tolerated as there is growing awareness of the power of human rights, said Craig Mokhiber,

a senior official in charge of development and economic and social issues of the UN Commission for Human Rights.

Knowledge and power of human rights education as demonstrated in the Exhibition, he said, empowers people to live with freedom and dignity.

He praised SGI’s initiative in spreading the human rights education and learning which ultimately helps the victims of “domestic violence in Turkey” or harsh and violent methods of segregation imposed by the Australian authorities.

SGI is a community-based Buddhist association with 12 million members around the world. Its members promote peace, culture and education as part of the long-standing tradition of Buddhist humanism.

Quoting SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, Hirotsugu Terasaki, the Tokyo-based organisation’s Director General of Peace and Global Issues said: “. . . it has never been more important to create and solidify a movement for human rights education that will foster the social conditions in which people treasure human diversity and dignity. . .”

In a statement read out by Terasaki, Ikeda said that the Exhibition was being held for the first time at the venue of the Human Rights Council meeting.

As the “dark forces of hatred and xenophobia are increasingly directed at refugees, migrants, and foreign nationals”, sustained efforts must be made at all levels to promote human rights education for combating and eradicating “all forms of discrimination, racism, stereotyping, and incitement to hatred, and the harmful attitudes and prejudices that underlie them”, Ikeda said in his statement.

In times of “profound transformation and uncertainty”, said Abdulaziz Almuzaini, director of UNESCO’s office in Geneva, “human rights education and freedoms is a fundamental tool to guarantee respect for the rights of all people”.

Almuzaini said the exhibition organized by SGI “demonstrates that human rights education can be a powerful tool for nurturing values, including peace, justice, non-violence, tolerance and respect for human



dignity”.

After the adoption of “universal declaration of human rights” seventy years ago, Almuzaini said, UNESCO wants “all human rights- civil, cultural, economic, social, and political- can be best spread and promoted through sustained human rights education, and learning”.

On behalf of the HRE 2020 – a coalition of 15 non-governmental organizations working on human rights and co-organizer of the exhibition – Emma Melander Borg underscored the need for continuous “monitoring and implementation of human rights as enshrined in the UN Declaration” in a world undermined by challenges to democracy and violations of human rights.

Against the backdrop of rising violence and growing violations of human rights by states and their new rulers, it is important to adopt “various approaches that are necessary” for empowering victims through human rights education and learning, Terasaki said.

Each case involving human rights violations needs a thorough examination for which human rights education must be central in all stages of peoples’ lives commencing at “elementary and primary” school. “Unless we create a feeling for understanding the importance of human rights in all people, human rights violations would be repeated. This is what [SGI’s] initiative aims at through the exhibition,” he told IDN-INPS, in an interview during the exhibition.

Asked about the current plight of immigrants and their dire plight in the United States, Terasaki said: “America has developed through pluralism and diversity which helped the country to develop rapidly. If they actually change their attitude then they are rejecting their past, they are denying their past.”

He expressed concern over the current global phase characterized by unpredictability, uncertainty, violence, deprivation, and anxiety and general attack on human rights. “That is the reason why SGI is making a strong effort on human rights education,” he argued.

Relevant to the theme of the Exhibition is the book titled “Age of Anger – A History Of The Present” by Pankaj Mishra, an Indian author and writer of literary and political essays.

Mishra says: “The post-9/11 policies of pre-emptive war, massive retaliation, regime change, nation-building and reforming Islam have failed – catastrophically failed – while the dirty war against the West’s own Enlightenment, inadvertently pursued through extrajudicial murder, torture, rendition, indefinite detention and massive surveillance, has been a wild success.” [IDN-InDepthNews – 09 March 2017]

Photo: Ambassador Maria Nazareth Farani Azevedo of Brazil (left in the photo) addressing launch of the Exhibition as representative of the Platform for Human Rights Education and Learning, comprising the governments of Brazil, Costa Rica, Italy, Morocco, the Philippines, Senegal, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Thailand | Kimiaki Kawai | SGI

Young People Drivers of UN Sustainable Development Agenda

Interview with Cristina Gallach, UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information

NEW YORK (IDN) - Representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academia adopted a global education action agenda affirming the importance of Sustainable Development Goal 4 – ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong opportunities for all – at the 66th United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) / NGO Conference that concluded on June 1, 2016 in Gyeongju, South Korea.

What has happened since? What role are youth groups playing in the second year of implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) endorsed by the international community in September 2015? Will there be a DPI / NGO conference in 2017 despite a new Secretary-General and management team taking office in January? What does it mean serving as Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information at the United Nations?

These are the questions Ramesh Jaura, Editor-in-Chief and International Correspondent of IDN, flagship agency of the International Press Syndicate (INPS) asked Cristina Gallach, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Department of Public Information (DPI). Read the Q&A in full:

Q: Nearly seven months ago on June 1, 2016 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academia adopted a global education action agenda at the UNDPI/NGO conference in Gyeongju, South Korea. What would you say has been achieved since then?

A: Last year's Conference in Gyeongju was a milestone moment in the UN's engagement with civil society. We had an unprecedented number of participants from NGOs, but also academics, students and youth groups as well. There is now an increasing recognition of the critical importance that education plays in achieving all of the goals in the 2030 Agenda.

DPI has been sharing the Gyeongju Action Plan with the wider UN and NGO communities since the Conference ended, with the aim of sparking further discussions and debates about how to take forward the agenda.

Since the Conference many NGOs have been active in their own communities, working to implement the action plan and the broader 2030 Agenda. We are seeing public events and panel discussions that are helping to build awareness of the key issues. Several NGOs have formed a steering committee to try to introduce an International Day of Education for Global Citizenship to the calendar.

Q: For the first time in the history of the DPI/NGO Conference, youth also developed and issued a Youth Declaration. You pointed out then that youth had "come in great numbers, demonstrating the value that they see in partnering with the United Nations". To what extent has partnership developed in the last seven months?

A: The relationship between the United Nations and youth continues to strengthen. We see young people as essential drivers of the sustainable development agenda, and we are increasingly turning to initiatives that harness the energy and passion of youth towards real advances and



changes on the ground.

After the Conference in Gyeongju, DPI launched a NGO youth steering committee to serve as an advisory body to both the UN and civil society partners on how to better engage youth and NGO youth groups around global issues.

Every week the UN is holding numerous youth-focused events and activities worldwide, either to highlight youth actions or to encourage greater awareness and engagement so that we can find solutions to the most pressing global challenges – whether it's climate changes or pollution, equal pay or sexual violence, ending hunger or defeating poverty.

And we have begun the process of identifying the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Youth, who will spearhead global advocacy efforts on behalf of youth. Ahmad Alhendawi's term just expired and Secretary-General António Guterres is extremely keen to have a successor in place very soon. He has identified mobilizing youth and working with youth as a key objective of his mandate.

Q: Do you see any specific role for the youth in the second year of Sustainable Development Goals and beyond?

A: The world is home today to the largest generation of youth in history, with as many 1.2 billion people between the ages of 15 and 24, and that number is likely to only continue to grow. Young people are of course our leaders of tomorrow and have a critical role in shaping our collective future.

Around the world we find youth are increasingly engaged in global issues, particularly the sustainable development agenda, and looking for ways they can make a positive difference, big or small. Many are already running or piloting innovative projects and ideas in their countries or communities.

Going forward, we must continue to engage young people, and youth organizations, to make sure they are at the forefront of implementing the new agenda. Young people, in turn, must keep raising their voices and ensuring they are heard.

Q: 2017 has started with a new Secretary-General assuming office and putting together a new management team. Should we nevertheless expect a DPI/NGO Conference this year? If yes, has a venue been decided?

A: We do not anticipate holding a DPI/NGO Conference this year – we are exploring options for holding the next global conference in 2018. In the meantime, we are working with the Secretary-General's team to ensure our work with NGOs is aligned to his substantive priorities.

Q: As your tenure as Head of the Department of Public Information comes to an end, what would you describe as the challenges you faced and the successes you achieved in making the activities of the UN known to the wider public? In how far would this experience be helpful to you in your next assignment?

A: Serving as Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information at the United Nations has been such a rewarding experience. I have the privilege of leading the global team that tells the UN story to the world each day.

The challenge is how to tell that story when we live in a world – and an era – when people speak hundreds of different languages and receive news and information in countless ways, from the familiar, like radio, posters and television, to the new, like social media. We have to reach as many people as possible, in as many ways as possible, while at the same time recognising that our budgets are not increasing.

That is why the magic word is partnerships. We can move across borders and through different languages, cultures, countries and generations if we truly work in partnership with governments, NGOs, private sector, activists... and all those ready to promote the UN agenda.

I have learned something in every job I've had and this one is no different. For me, the depth and variety of issues that we have handled during the last two years is unique. And even more impressive is that from every corner in the world – Member States, media, civil society, business sector – there exists a genuine interest and willingness to work with the UN. The United Nations is the partner of choice, the most powerful mobilizer and the true convenor of those that want to work for a better world. [IDN-InDepthNews – 21 February 2017]

Photo: Cristina Gallach, UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, at a press conference in Gyeongju, South Korea on June 1, 2016 | Katsuhiko Asagiri | IDN-INPS

Iceland Shares Land Restoration Expertise with the Needy

By Lowana Veal

REYKJAVIK (IDN) – Back in 1907, at a time in which Iceland was already faced with severe land degradation problems caused mainly by overgrazing and logging for firewood, the Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI) was set up as a governmental agency with the mission of preventing soil erosion and reclaiming eroded land.

Much has been learned in the intervening years and keen to pass on its expertise, SCSI – in collaboration with the Agricultural University of Iceland (AUI) – is now running a United Nations University (UNU) training programme targeting participants from developing countries.

The programme, officially known as the United Nations University Land Restoration Training Programme (UNU-LRT), is one of four UNU training programmes based in Iceland. The other three cover Fisheries, Geothermal Energy and Gender Equality.

Funded mainly by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and various international development agencies, UNU-LRT was started in 2007 and ran on an experimental basis for its first three years, but has since become permanent.

Students, or fellows as they are called in the programme, are recruited from developing countries, mostly from Ghana, Uganda, Mongolia, Lesotho, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Malawi, Niger and Namibia.

Aged 25-40, those selected are already working in their field in a partner university, government department or local research

institute, and are proposed for the training by their institution after which they are interviewed by UNU-LRT staff.

After completing the training, they then return to their former workplace where they share their newly gained expertise with their co-workers. Around 12-15 fellows attend the training each year.

“The main issues facing many developing countries in regard to land degradation are overgrazing, deforestation, unsustainable land use, climate change and natural hazards,” programme director Hafdis Hanna Aegisdottir told IDN.

Even though programme participants come from Africa and Central Asia, Aegisdottir said that the problems are actually remarkably similar worldwide, so students learn techniques, methods and theories which they can then apply in their own countries.

“Of course, we cannot tell them which plants to use to restore land as that will vary from place to place, but we can tell them about the pros and cons of using such plants, and the problems incurred by invasive species,” she added.

According to Aegisdottir, land degradation is closely linked to climate change as it releases carbon from soil and vegetation which subsequently ends up in the atmosphere. “But the good news is that the carbon can be returned back to the ecosystems by land restoration,” she explained.

During the annual six-month training offered

by UNU-LRT, fellows learn about land degradation processes and land assessment methods; restoration ecology; land use and restoration planning; sustainable grazing management (open land, rangelands); soil erosion and soil conservation.

Gender equality plays an integral part in UNU-LRT. Besides having a gender balance on the course, fellows are expected to have developed equality perspectives in the field of land restoration and sustainable land management, because unequal access to power and decision-making is considered to undermine all efforts at addressing environmental issues, including land restoration.

A key part of the training involves a research project carried out by each fellow, using either data from their homeland or data gathered during research in Iceland. “Fellows are very pleased with this part of the training, as with other parts,” said Aegisdottir.

One former fellow, Azamat Isakov, has become director of the CAMP Alattoo Foundation since participating in the training programme in 2013 and has subsequently published the research on grazing problems in Kyrgyzstan that he and his supervisor carried out as part of UNU-LRT.

Another former fellow, Esther Ekuamoako from northern Ghana, had been wanting to take part in some kind of environmental literacy programme for children for a long time. She was torn between doing community



education and using radio but at the same time was aware of the time and cost involved in mobilising communities.

In 2012 she was invited to participate in the land restoration training course in Iceland and that was a turning point, she says. “The courses on environmental literacy linking knowledge to practice ... learning from the success stories of involving children in restoration in Iceland ... Junior Land Care clubs gave me the insight and direction,” she explains. “I then decided in Iceland to come back home and put this knowledge into practice. I found the approach to educating children to be very affordable, reliable, cheaper and making a great impact,” she says.

Amoako started with five clubs in three schools. She teaches at least 40 pupils in the larger schools and 25 in the smaller ones. “I had support from the regional Environmental Protection Agency and my faculty (Natural Resource and Environment, University for Development Studies) to form Environmental Literacy clubs in selected schools. Currently, the faculty has agreed to adopt the clubs and hopes to extend to other schools,” says Amoako.

Chantsaa Jamsranjav from Mongolia, who attended the training in 2010 and has since completed a PhD in the United States, says that “the findings of my LRT project work were very useful for my work as a community development specialist on the Green Gold Project [of the Mongolian Society for Range Management] at that time after I returned to Mongolia. I shared my project findings during several trainings conducted in the field and it was also useful to get feedback from local people for the further improvement of the idea.”

Jamsranjav added: “Herders in community-based rangeland management herder groups became active in resting and rotating seasonal pastures as a result of greater collaboration, knowledge exchange and information access. They have started doing field vegetation monitoring, which is also a very good first step for herders to realise their rangeland condition, and has contributed to improving management.”

Jamsranjav now works for an international NGO, Mercy Corps Mongolia, as a programme performance and quality coordinator. “After I joined the Mercy Corps [in March 2016] I conducted a rural communities’ resilience assessment and the findings of this assessment were used to inform a new programme called ‘Resilient Communities Programme’. The focus ... is to build adaptive capacities of rural communities to overcome economic and natural disasters and stresses.”

UNU-LRT is currently extending its activities in partner countries, after Aegisdottir and her colleagues received a grant following the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21) in Paris to organise short courses elsewhere. The first one will be a two-week course in Uganda later in 2017, attended by about 25 environmental officers from local government.

UNU-LRT is also involved in developing ENABLE (European Network for the Advancement of Business and Landscape Education), which is part of the European Commission’s Erasmus+ programme. This project will establish an education platform to create awareness about the functioning of ecosystems and the benefits of sustainable landscape management. It will be open to all, but is particularly aimed at business and management students and professionals, along with policy and decision-makers.

Like UNU-LRT, the project will work directly towards Goal 15 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). [IDN-InDepthNews - 18 February 2017]

Photo: Club members with some teachers from the schools and teaching assistants from my institution | Lowana Veal | IDN-INPS

Tanzanian Schools Turn to Maximising Resource Use

By Kizito Makoye Shigela



DAR ES SALAAM (IDN) – The ringing of the bell marks the end of lessons at Hekima Primary School, and for 10-year-old Leila Kitwana and her classmates it signals time to tend the school’s vegetable gardens where students take turns to water vertical gardens through a drip irrigation system using rainwater stored in giant tanks.

“We grow different types of vegetables, they are an important part of our meal,” says Kitwana.

Until recently, most students at this school in the impoverished Tandale area of Kinonodoni district in Dar es Salaam Region had spent more time looking for water than attending lessons. “We had a borehole but the water there was too salty to drink,” explains Kitwana. “We only used it for cleaning toilets.”

Teachers note that an acute shortage of water, coupled with a poor learning environment, had forced many students from low-income families to abandon lessons. But ever since the school adopted the Urban NEXUS approach, which seeks to use water, energy and food resources efficiently and in an integrated manner, the situation has improved remarkably.

Through the Urban NEXUS approach, opportunities are harnessed

to link water and sanitation, energy, food and waste, solutions which would have otherwise been missed with a single development application.

Under the Operationalisation of the Urban NEXUS pilot project, sponsored by ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability and the German Development Cooperation agency (GTZ) at a cost of Euro 57,000, the Hekima Primary School, along with neighbouring Elimu Primary School, has been able to use available resources more efficiently.

According to Munga Mtengeti, head teacher at the Hekima Primary School, the project has made it possible for the school to reduce fuel wood consumption, obtain access to more water, and grow and use vegetables for the school’s feeding programme.

“We have plenty of water and energy resources now,” said Mtengeti. “Students no longer toil to fetch water and instead spend more time in their classrooms.”

Tanzania’s fast growing urban population presents a huge challenge for the management of water, energy, food and sanitation supply systems, with local authorities often unable to fully exploit the potential of available resources because they plan and manage their affairs along sectoral lines.

The Urban Nexus approach therefore tries to change the manner in which limited resources are used in order to achieve better results through a unified and integrated system.

“We wanted to create a vision for schools so that they can become self-sustained with their own water supply, energy and improved sanitation,” said Sarah Birch, a project manager with ICLEI.

“We have halved the amount of wood used for cooking, doubled the amount of available water in the rainy season, and increased access to food,” she said, adding that “we wanted to ensure that students are well nourished, not only with a humble porridge but also with nutritious vegetable stews.”

Birch said that the primary schools are also setting up a biogas plant which would use a substantial amount of the waste produced in the neighbourhood, noting that “we can create energy from human waste within communities and at public facilities.”

In the face of the growing threat of climate change, analysts say that new Urban NEXUS models are required to reduce the risks and create a future productive and resilient city that can maintain its high contribution to local and national economic development.

Dar es Salaam faces a myriad risks and vulnerabilities, including scarcity of energy and water, poor waste management, poverty and high unemployment rates.

With almost 70 percent of its inhabitants living in informal settlements, Dar es Salaam is highly vulnerable to flooding, especially in densely populated slum areas like Tandale where heavy rains often result in severe floods that force thousands of people from their homes and cause millions of dollars worth of damage.

In crowded communities, schools are ideal places of contact, often serving as hubs for increased resilience during flooding, said Birch.

According to Yohana Mgonja, a Kinondoni municipality official, the experience derived from the school project seeks to serve as a model for other schools and public institutions, while presenting the opportunity for environmental education. “We can inspire community members to do the same if we showcase that this can be done vertically, up walls and in small compact spaces,” said Mgonja.

In fact, he added, many community members pass by to look at the project and ask questions about what they can do in their own homes.

The Urban NEXUS pilot project in Tanzania is part of a larger project which is also being implemented in South Asia. Nashik, the third largest city in Maharashtra state and one of the fastest growing in India – known for its vineyards and grape production – was also chosen as the site of a pilot project aiming to showcase the benefit of an Urban NEXUS approach through identification of the links among the water, energy and food sectors.

The issues of water, energy and food security, and their interrelationships, gained heightened international attention during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (or Rio+20) in June 2012 and played an important role in formulating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“Nowadays, with the cumulative risks associated with climate change and resource depletion, cities have to change how they progress, build, develop and plan,” said Satya Narayana, a Najik city council official.

“Figuring out where these opportunities lie, how to grasp hold of them and then how to plan and implement them is really the question that is posing a challenge in many cities,” he added. [IDN-InDepthNews – 17 February 2017]

Photo: Demonstration of maximising resource use | Kizito Makoye Shigela | IDN-INPS

Search For 'Hopeful Spots' As Funding Cuts Threaten UN

By Ramesh Jaura

BERLIN | NEW YORK (IDN) – While a drastic cut in U.S. contributions is hanging like a Damocles' Sword over the head of the new UN Secretary-General António Guterres, senior Government officials and civil society representatives have stressed the “nexus” between enduring peace and sustainable development, urging the need to raise awareness about such a link beyond the world body's headquarters in New York.

Goal 16 of the Agenda for Sustainable Development that highlights the importance of the need to “promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies” underlines such an innate bond, they say, but it has escaped wider public and diplomatic attention – one year after the United Nations started implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) endorsed by 193 member states in September 2015.

With this in view, the General Assembly organised in a landmark step a two-day high-level dialogue on January 24-25 underscoring the innate link between sustainable development and sustaining peace.

Highlighting the importance of the “security-development nexus”, Yerzhan Ashikbayev, Kazakhstan's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs said, security challenges around the world were threatening development gains. For its part, Kazakhstan had vowed to concentrate efforts on preventing and putting an end to armed

conflict regionally and globally.

However, there remained an “unfortunate lack of trust” between nations, he said, urging the UN to fast-track its mediation efforts. New avenues had recently opened in that regard, including through the Security Council's widening thematic obligations and closer cooperation between the United Nations various organs.

Spotlighting the lack of resources as a major development challenge, he called on Member States to consider channelling 1 per cent of their defence budgets to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

“Multifaceted challenges require multipronged responses,” he said, noting that efforts to promote Goal 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive societies were particularly relevant in that regard. At the national level, Kazakhstan was working to integrate the Goals into its strategies on the basis of democratic governance, the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

Earlier, addressing the General Assembly for the first time since taking office on January 1, UN Secretary-General Guterres said: “We need a global response that addresses the root causes of conflict and integrates peace, sustainable development and human rights in a holistic way, from conception to execution.”

Inequality remained high around the globe, he said, with the world's eight richest individuals holding the same wealth as its 3.6 billion poorest. People and entire countries felt

they had been left behind, with devastating new conflicts erupting and old ones remaining intractable.

Echoing that sentiment, Sujata Mehta, Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, drew attention to chronic disparities and continued inequality, as well as the emergence of non-traditional challenges such as violent extremism.

Technology continued to shrink the world and the lives of people in distant countries were increasingly intertwined, with economies tied ever closer, pandemics able to spread more easily and terror networks able to strike anywhere.

At the same time, economic growth, inclusive development security and general human well-being were closely linked, she said, so that their enjoyment anywhere in the world had implications elsewhere.

Noting that the link between peace and development underpinned both the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda, she nevertheless said that progress since then had been “less than encouraging”, with pushback from donors in financing those agreements.

“Walking back from commitments made can harm us all,” she warned, calling for a deeper focus on longer-term development. “We live in a global village,” she added, calling on States to commit to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and on the United Nations to back them.

Nigeria's Anthony Bosah said sustainable

development, peace and economic growth must be guaranteed and he urged coordinated efforts in that regard. The 2030 Agenda and the quest for sustainable peace were parts of a unified whole. It was disconcerting that the drivers of violence – some new, others long-standing – had drastic implications for international and regional efforts to support countries in moving beyond conflict.

Welcoming the United Nations efforts to build synergies between the new Agenda and sustainable peace through partnerships with regional and subregional organizations, he said the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had made significant achievements in resolving conflicts.

'Benchmark in truth-telling'

General Assembly President Peter Thomson of Fiji, an island country in Melanesia in the South Pacific Ocean, said that the adoption of the sustaining peace resolutions by the Assembly and the Security Council had signalled a new, cross-sectoral, comprehensive and integrated approach to peace and development.

Calling on participants to explore mutually reinforcing ways to sustain peace while delivering on the 2030 Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, he also urged them to make the dialogue a "benchmark in truth-telling" on the subject.

"Taken in tandem, the 2030 Agenda and the sustaining peace resolutions make it clear that Member States regard sustainable development and sustaining peace as two agendas that stand or fall together,"

Thomson said, emphasizing the need to generate unstoppable momentum in implementing the SDGs and to recognize that sustainable peace was both an enabler and an outcome of sustainable development.

Protracted conflict currently affected 17 countries, he said, adding that 2 billion people lived in countries troubled by fragility, conflict and violence. Ninety-five per cent of refugees and internally displaced persons in developing countries had meanwhile been affected by the same 10 conflicts since 1991.

The General Assembly President also emphasized the need for action and reform by the United Nations system under the leadership of the Secretary-General, with the active support and engagement of Member States, and noted that the proceedings of the two days would contribute to preparations for a high-level meeting on peacebuilding and sustaining peace to be convened during the Assembly's seventy-second session later this year.

2030 Agenda a universal tool

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden and President of the Security Council for January, speaking on behalf of the Council, said she recently attended a meeting of the Arctic Council in Norway at which scientists painted a bleak picture of the Arctic environment.

One of the scientists, asked how he could sleep at night, replied that he preferred to look for "hope spots" where solutions could be discussed, she said, adding that the high-level dialogue could be such a "hope spot". "In these times of nationalism, polarization and

fear, we can send a message of hope that change is possible," she said.

Referring to the Security Council's open debate earlier in January on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, she said Member States must consider their will and capacity to act on reports of potential conflict, as well as the tools at their disposal.

The 2030 Agenda was a universal tool that required all countries and people to be involved in peacebuilding and prevention, she said, emphasizing the need for strong institutions and good governance as set out in Goal 16.

She underscored the importance of risk management, root causes, early warning and early action; for the United Nations to strengthen its cooperation with other organizations, including the World Bank; and the role of women in contributing to early warning and alternative conflict prevention measures. Preventing conflict was also economically the smart thing to do, she said, with more effective conflict prevention resulting in less development spending on humanitarian assistance.

Ambassador Macharia Kamu of Kenya, speaking in his capacity as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, called the SDGs a road map to achieve a more resilient world, and encouraged Member States to grasp the dialogue as a starting point for the Organization to fulfil its promises on the matter. "This meeting will go down in history as a milestone for the work of peace," he said.

Ry Tuy, Cambodia's Permanent Representative to the UN, pointed out that his



country knew all too well about the cost of conflict, adding that building sustainable peace for all was among its top priorities. As education was central to building peace, Cambodia’s National Strategic Development Plan focused on expanding equal economic opportunities for men and women.

Speakers from the Maldives and Trinidad and Tobago discussed peace and development in the context of climate change, with the former proposing that vulnerable small island developing States be given a seat on the Security Council to ensure that the issue remained on its agenda “while there is still time to act”.

Zamora Rivas, El Salvador’s Permanent Representative to the UN, said peace agreements and political reforms had enabled his country to overcome armed conflict. Despite that significant achievement, however, he said El Salvador needed socioeconomic development for all segments of society, and called upon the Secretary-General to provide the requisite support for that to occur.

Zimbabwe’s Frederick Makamure Shava, President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), was among the many speakers highlighting the links between the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture, which together had paved the way for a better, more inclusive and sustainable world.

Civil society representative Julienne Lusenge, speaking for the Fund for Congolese Women and the Female Solidarity for Integrated Peace and Development, was among several speakers who shared concrete experiences with such conflict drivers, including the illicit exploitation of natural resources and the resulting unequal distribution of wealth in her home country, the Democratic Republic of Congo. [IDN-InDepthNews – 28 January 2017]

Photo: UN Secretary-General Guterres (left) and General Assembly President Thomson at the high-level dialogue on January 24 | UN

Kashmiri Community Propagates Peace Amid Simmering Violence

By Stella Paul

KULGAM/KASHMIR, India (IDN) – Travelling along the roads of South Kashmir, you are constantly greeted by pro-liberation and anti-India slogans. They are written on the tar roads, house walls, little signboards hanging from tree branches and even lamp posts.

“Go India Go Back” and “We Want Freedom” read some; others proclaim “Burhan is Alive” or “Burhan Zindabad” – in reference to Burhan Wani, a young militant gunned down by the security forces in July 2016.

But suddenly, the slogans begin to change. Signposts and walls appear adorned with messages like “Welcome” and “Love for All, Hatred for None”. That is when you know you are in a village of the Ahmadiyya community.

With a population of merely 10,000, the Ahmadiyyas are a minority community in Kashmir – a state with a population of over 12 million. While some are

scattered across the state, most of the community members are concentrated in four villages of the Kulgam and Shopian district of south Kashmir: Kanipora, Shurat, Yaripora and Reashinagar.

Messages of peace, interfaith harmony and respect – written in bold and colourful hues – are a common feature in all of these villages.

And if a visitor engages in conversation with a villager, talk typically revolves around academics, employment and the global climate – with barely any mention of the anti-India rhetoric that is omnipresent in the valley.

Integration in times of separation

Although the pro-liberation movement in Kashmir valley has lasted nearly seven decades, there have been periods of relative calm, but since the killing of Burhan Wani in July, the entire valley has been in the throes of tremendous violence, with both the security forces and militants intensifying their attacks against each other.

The unrest led to a ceaseless shutdown, ambush of army convoys, stone hurling and arson by pro-separatists and retaliatory action by the security forces, including firing of tear gas, shooting of pellets and random search and arrests. As a result, casualties have shot up,

including the death of nearly one hundred civilians, while over 600 have been injured.

All through this period of turmoil, the Ahmadiyya community has maintained a rare distance from anti-state demonstrations, refusing to participate in the violent acts of protests and instead focusing on preaching love and peace – which it considers as the true teaching of Islam.

Basharat Ahmed Dar, village head of Asnoor in Kulgam, says that “the true lesson of Quran is to love everyone. This is what is preached at our mosques. This is what our children grow up hearing. This is what we also practise in real life.”

Rampant persecution

Ahmadiyya (also mentioned as ‘Ahmadiya’, ‘Amhadi’ and ‘Qadiayan’) is a reformist movement within Islam, founded in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1835-1908) from Qadian in India’s Punjab state.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmed claimed that he was the divine reformer and the promised Messiah awaited by Muslims. The followers of this school of thought are called Ahmadiyyas.

However, many non-Ahmadiyyas consider this as anti-Islam because, according to them, Mohammad is the last prophet and there are no other prophets or messiah after him.

So, although they speak of love and harmony, the Ahmadiyyas have been regularly persecuted by other sects. From stone pelting, vandalising their mosques and attacking them verbally and physically to labelling them ‘non-Muslims’ and denying them rights to Hajj (the annual pilgrimage to Mecca), attacks on the community have been almost without end.

In Kashmir, one such attack took place in 2012 when the grand cleric of Kashmir – Mufti Muhammad Bashir-ud-din – demanded that a special law be brought in to declare the Ahmadiyya sect as “non-Muslim”. According to the grand cleric, several countries in the world – including neighbouring Pakistan – had already declared the Ahmadiyyas as non-Muslims and Kashmir should follow the suit.

More recently, in October 2015, prominent political leader Mirwaiz



Photo: Placards, stressing the need of education and peace adorn the frontyard of a school run by the Ahmadiyya community in Reashinagar village in Shopian district of southern Kashmir (India) | Stella Paul | IDN-INPS

Umar Farooq vowed to stop the Ahmadiyyas from spreading “tentacles in Kashmir”.

Ironically, Farooq – a staunch supporter of the self-determination rights of every Kashmiri – often accuses the government of India of suppressing the voices of Kashmiri people and violating their human rights. When it comes to the Ahmadiyyas, however, he stands against the same rights for the sect.

Focus on education

But even amid the continued hostility, the Ahmadiyyas are increasingly focusing on education and professional excellence. For example, the community runs five schools in South Kashmir – each one of them known for its quality education and high academic performances. Almost every youth in the community is also studying at a college or university with several of them topping their class.

According to data provided by their religious headquarters in Qadiyan, the community has a 95 percent literacy rate (compared with the 66 percent for the entire state population). Beside doctors, university professors and highly-placed government officials, there are 300 teachers – an impressive number for a tiny community.

The community also has a grand gathering once every year in Qadiyan where youngsters are recognised for their academic and other achievements and encouraged to excel further. “We do face discrimination. It may not always be life-threatening, but we know we are hated,” says Abdur Rahman Iltu, head of Reashinagar village in Shopian district – the largest Ahmadiyya village in Kashmir.

“We know they (other communities) spit

on our booklets that carry the messages of peace. But we tell our children that education is the real key to a good life. Without good education, our children will be lost and succumb to negative propaganda and destructive actions like many others do and we, as a community, are committed to avoiding that.”

Hiding their identity

Ishfaq Amin (whose real name has not been revealed for security reasons) is an officer in the state police force. Posted in Srinagar, an hour-long journey from his village in Kulgam district, Amin carries a second ID card that shows him as a teacher.

As the taxi he commutes in nears home, he takes off the government ID and hides it inside his shirt. This is the safety measure he must take, in order to avoid being identified and attacked by rebels and their supporters. According to Amin, although militants attack any army and police person, targeted killing of Ahmadiyyas in particular is a rising threat.

Several other youths from his community are also serving in the police and the armed forces. All of them conceal their professional identity to fend off attacks while not on duty. “Even when they are not wearing uniforms, they are regarded as conspirators against Kashmiris and attacked,” says Amin.

Hope amid fear

Arafat, a 14-year-old high school student in Kanipora village in Kulgam, is just another teenager who dreams of becoming a doctor someday and making his family proud. However, he is convinced that this dream can only come true if he leaves Kashmir and

studies elsewhere.

“I want to go to New Delhi and study in the Aligarh Muslim University because here the air of hatred and violence is too disturbing,” Arafat told IDN. Barely a week after the interview, his policeman father was gunned down by suspected militants near his home – a grim reflection of the disturbing reality.

Arafat is not alone. In villages throughout the entire Ahmadiyya community, young people – both male and female – talk of leaving the valley and migrating to Delhi or other states, in order to study.

The elders, on the other hand, want young people to stay return and live in the valley. Barkat Ahmed, a resident of Shurat village in Kulgam, wants his son, who is currently a post-doctoral student in New Delhi, to return home in the future.

Ahmed believes that contrary to what people say, the real number of pro-separatists who indulge in violence is actually very small and, like most of the elders in his community, that peace will return to the valley one day.

“As preached by the head of our sect, our community has always held mutual respect, tolerance and true education very close to its heart,” says Barkat, hope gleaming in his eyes.

“These are the tools, not guns, that can ultimately bring peace to our trouble-torn homeland. We need our youths to be there, spreading these positive messages and contributing to the building of a just and fair future.” [IDN-InDepthNews – 16 January 2017]

Moroccan Campaign Not Dampening Some Migrants' Dreams

By Fabíola Ortiz

FEZ, OUJDA and NADOR, Morocco (IDN) – Morocco, traditionally a pathway for sub-Saharan Africans wanting to reach Europe, is now enforcing a national strategy to contain the flow of migrants towards the EU and stifle the aspirations of those still wanting to cross.

There are many reasons that lead people to depart from their countries and become a migrant, often risking their lives on dangerous routes in search of a better life.

Abdoul Karime is a 19-year-old Ivorian who first came to Morocco in 2013 when he was still a teenager and since then has been living amid improvised tents in an informal settlement next to the main train station in the city of Fez.

“I left because of poverty, I had no money to live nor family to support me. I’m alone and decided to leave my town to reach Europe and make my living there”, told IDN.

Karime, who does not know how to read or write, dreams of going to England, and sees Morocco only as a waiting place.

Life in Morocco has not been easy for undocumented migrants like Karime.

Lack of formal jobs is just one of the many difficulties migrants face once they arrive in this North African country.

“I have no food to eat,” said Karime. “I’ve looked for a job everywhere and I’ve never found one. I would do any sort of work just to get some money.”

Karime is among the thousands of sub-Saharan Africans living in Morocco without the legal status of residence. Although he applied to be regularised, he did not meet the bureaucratic criteria required for obtaining a legal permit.

As a country of passage and with an increasing number of foreign residents since the early 2000s, Morocco has been tightening the control of irregular migration to the EU.

A 2013 report on Morocco by the UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families pointed to the need to amend Law 02-03 (2003) which officially deals with the “entry and stay of foreigners into the Kingdom of Morocco, irregular emigration and immigration.”

Morocco’s National Human Rights Council has also called for changes to Morocco’s immigration policy. According to the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute, among the reforms advocated by the NHRC are halting “police violence against irregular migrants and their deportation to Morocco’s borders, the correction of discrimination against non-nationals, access to justice and basic services.”

A global policy on immigration was subsequently prepared, focusing mainly on asylum, immigration, human trafficking and integration.

A mass regularisation campaign was carried out in 2014 with strict conditions. People in illegal situations had to satisfy a number of prerequisites such as having held a valid labour contract for the previous two years or demonstrating five years of continuous residence in the country.



Karime had no permanent job to show and his application was turned down.

Unlike Karime, 25-year-old Khadija Turé from Senegal was among the lucky applicants who had their request approved but she is still waiting for the official paper to be issued.

She left Dakar three years ago with her husband, who was lucky to find a fixed job in a factory in Fez. Turé, instead, wanders around down-town as a street seller offering cheap jewellery.

“It’s insane what people do to cross the sea to Europe. I’d never do that, I want to get legal papers. If I could take a safer way to Europe, I would. Inshallah. What I’d really like to have done was stay in Senegal but there’s no money there,” she lamented.

Nousa Omusigho, a 52-year-old Nigerian father of two children, has been struggling over the last 17 years he has been residing in Morocco after leaving Nigeria due to the threats imposed by the radical Islamist group Boko Haram.

Most of his years in Morocco were spent without documents until he was finally regularised in 2014, but that has not solved all his problems.

Omusigho talked to IDN on a cold, windy and grey day in the city of Oujda, near the Algerian border. He was standing in front of a supermarket entrance begging for a few dirhams and seeking people’s solidarity.

“I have a Moroccan card, I am a citizen of this country, but I’m not living fine here,” he said. “I beg for money and use it for eating and for paying the rent. My wife is also Nigerian and lives here too. She tried to go to Europe once, but was deported from Spain.”

He told IDN that if he ever had enough money he would take his family back to Nigeria, saying “I’m sick, I’m not living well. I want to go back home now.”

By September 2014, there were around 86,000 non-nationals in Morocco, with sub-Saharan Africans accounting for the majority. Estimates of those in an irregular situation differ, but the governmental campaign for regularisation covered around 21,500 requests concerning nationals of non-Arab African countries, out of approximately 27,600.

“The question that raises now is what to do in the post-regularisation

phase,” said Latifa Benameur, a project assistant at the Moroccan Human Rights Organisation (OMDH) based in Oujda, some 500 km from the capital Rabat.

“Integrating migrants within the society is an enormous challenge. The new migration strategy has not been adapted to the specific needs migrant communities have, like professional training.”

At the same time, she noted, “we’re close to the border with Algeria. Everyday there are new people coming, they have to pay smugglers because the Algerian-Moroccan border is closed. Most people dream about Europe.”

Said Kaddami, an activist for the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH), the oldest association in the country established in 1979, is sceptical about the new policy.

Kaddami is based in the city of Nador, near the Spanish autonomous enclave of Melilla, where hundreds of migrants try to storm the fence from time to time to cross into Spanish soil.

“It’s a failed policy, nothing has changed here in Nador, Kaddami told IDN. “The way the police and the government deal with migrants is still the same, they’re arresting them. Migrants are suffering in the hands of the police. Morocco doesn’t give any safe place or shelter to stay, they just want to take migrants away from the fence borders.”

The image Morocco is selling to the international community is one of a good place to stay and one in which “immigrants want to settle” but, he added, the migrants who are arriving have the goal of crossing and becoming so-called ‘bosas’.

‘Bosa’ is a colloquial expression referring to the sub-Saharan Africans who are able to overcome all barriers and finally cross the fences to the EU.

“I don’t see people wanting to stay,” said Kaddami. “They have no place here.” [IDN-InDepthNews - 08 January 2017]

Photo: Senegalese street sellers in Fez | Fabiola Ortiz | IDN-INPS

More Indigenous Doctors Aim To Close Australia's Health Gap

By Neena Bhandari

SYDNEY (IDN) - Vinka Barunga was born in the Worrara tribe of the Mowanjum Aboriginal community in the remote town of Derby in Western Australia. As a child, she witnessed disease and suicide amongst her people, which made her resolve to one day become a doctor and help break this cycle of suffering. She is one of six, the largest cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students, to graduate in Medicine/Surgery from the University of Western Australia this year.

Australia has fewer than 300 Aboriginal doctors, but things are gradually changing. Vinka is determined to be the first full time doctor in the town of her birth, situated around 2,400 kilometres north of the state capital Perth in the Kimberley region. It is the gateway to the state's resource rich north, surrounded by mudflats on three sides, with two distinct seasons.

Tropical and non-communicable diseases, kidney ailments, skin and ear infections are common here. "There is also a long history of introduced diseases. Derby had a leprosarium so there were a lot of Aboriginal people that had leprosy living here," says Vinka, who observes that alcohol and high sugar diets have significantly impacted on her people's health.

The Derby Aboriginal Health Service (DABS) provides walk-in access to General Practitioners and conducts outreach programmes in remote communities along the 670km-long Gibb River road. There are nurses that tend to small community clinics and doctors visit as often as they can.

"Aboriginal people of this region are largely nomadic and the remoteness of communities makes providing 24/7 health service difficult. Even when services are available, people often don't use them because they might be going to the same clinic, but they are seeing the fifth doctor. It is hard to build trust and that can be quite devastating for people's health," says Vinka, who lost her non-Indigenous mother to glioblastoma (brain tumour) at the age of 18 and her father to a long struggle with illness exacerbated by alcohol abuse when she was in her fifth year of medicine.

During her 10-month placement at Derby's Rural Clinical School, she noticed young children looking up to her for inspiration and the elders brimming with pride for what she had achieved. Many Aboriginal patients address her and her other Indigenous colleagues as aunty or uncle or niece or nephew, even though they are not related.

"I think, everyone unconsciously becomes a part of your large extended family. One really can't put a price on what Aboriginal doctors will bring to an Indigenous patient's experience of hospital, of their illness and of healing. A bit of social and emotional support can work wonders. Having more Aboriginal doctors is definitely going to have a positive impact on Aboriginal and Australian Health", says Vinka, who at 27 is hopeful that despite the challenges, the health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people will reduce during her lifetime.

"We have to see the positives, where we can and I definitely want to contribute and be part of those positive changes. The big positive for me has been to see how the women in the Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley got alcohol restrictions imposed and that has made huge progress in the diagnosis, management and therapy programmes for children and families with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum disorders", Vinka told IDN.

Aboriginal people make up just 3 percent of the country's 24 million population, but they suffer from significantly poorer health, suicides, higher rates of drug and alcohol consumption, imprisonment, homelessness and poverty.

The Prime Minister's 2016 Closing the Gap report states that the target to halve the gap in child mortality by 2018 is on track and immunisation rates for Indigenous children are high. But even though total Indigenous mortality rates have declined by 16 per cent since 1998, the target to close the gap in life expectancy by 2031 is not on track. Indigenous people live on an average 10 years less than non-Indigenous Australians.

Romlie Mokak, Chief Executive Officer of the Melbourne-based Lowitja Institute, Australia's national institute for ATSI health research, attributes



the simple reason for Indigenous people trailing behind in health outcomes to the circumstances that have been a continuing legacy of colonisation.

He says, "The policies that came out of colonisation had a basis in racism essentially, the superiority of the colonisers and the dehumanisation of the first peoples – taking culture, language, removing people from their traditional lands, forcibly removing children from their families was hugely problematic. We still talk about inter-generational trauma to this day".

When the British landed in Australia in the 1700s, they did so by declaring it terra nullius, ignoring the original inhabitants who had lived on the continent for nearly 70,000 years. Between 1900 and 1970 under the Government Assimilation Policies to "breed out" Aborigine blood and supposedly give them a better life, the government forcibly removed tens and thousands of ATSI children from their families. Many were sent to institutions where they were abused and neglected.

"This continuing disruption and destruction of family and

culture is ever present. We also have to deal with the ubiquity of racism in its overt as well as well as systemic or institutionalised form, which many studies have shown to have a detrimental effect on health and wellbeing", says Mokak, a Djugun man and member of the Yawuru people from Western Australia.

Secondly, he adds, it is the question of equity in services or nation's resources and policy making, intrinsic in that is how power is exacted. "We continue to be invisible in the corridors of power. The portrayal of our people is largely negative and most people's understanding of Indigenous people is through a fairly narrow lens as they don't have any real or intimate contact with Aboriginal people", says Mokak

Indigenous policy needs to be an inverted pyramid, whereby the grassroots Indigenous communities are at the top of policy making, he adds. There has been some improvement in more Indigenous children completing year 12 and university, especially in the medical field.

Katarina Keller is the first person in her family to get a Bachelor of Nursing Degree. Growing up in Ceduna, gateway to the treeless Nullarbor Plains in far west South Australia, she enjoyed the fresh seafood and marvelled at traditional bush medicines used in her Kokatha Indigenous community. But she was also distressed to see people in her community die at a young age due to comorbidity.

She is determined to work in making her people live longer and healthier lives. "Coming from similar cultural background, it is easy for me to connect with indigenous patients. They are comfortable sharing their problems and I can better respond to their needs. If the health gap between the indigenous and non-indigenous people has to be closed, we would need many more health workers, who are aware of indigenous history and culture", Katarina told IDN. [IDN-InDepthNews - 27 December 2016]

Photo: Vinka Barunga | University of Western Australia.

SDGs in Asia Risk Hijacking by Western Activists

By Kalinga Seneviratne



BANGKOK (IDN) – Early December three UN agencies UNDP, UNESCO and UNFPA organized a three-day youth mobilizing program at the UNESCAP building here called ‘Case for Space’ (C4S) touted as a campaign led by over 60 partners in the region to raise awareness and advocate for the promotion of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Asia-Pacific region.

Yet, it was dominated by mainly European and American speakers and consultants, with the project being led by a UK-based activist group Restless Development, which made many participants from the region to wonder whether the SDG agenda is being hijacked by westerner activists.

The C4S campaign is supposed to mobilise young people in the Asia-Pacific region to be engaged as “critical stakeholders” in the implementation of the SDGs. It should also allow “socially excluded” people to be engaged in the process, by creating space via social media and digital communications. It is supposed to build networks and capacities for the engagement of young people.

While all sounds good on paper, the way the project was initiated in Bangkok raises many questions about the involvement of Asians themselves in the process. Most of the speakers in plenary sessions who were trying to motivate Asian youth were from Europe or America and there was no noteworthy Asian expert in digital or social media among the speakers. Asia is not short of such talent, there are many around such as Steven Gan from Malaysiakini or Maria Reza from Rapplers in the Philippines.

The event was attended by over 200 youth from across the region, most of them with an activist slant. Even the youth newsroom that was organized and coordinated by four westerners had about 15 young journalists but not from any of the mainstream media. The focus of their stories were mainly based on ‘voices of dissent’ rather than looking at communication methodologies that could contribute towards a more cooperative and peaceful path towards achieving the SDGs.

A youth participant from Cambodia with rural roots explained to IDN that this type of open dissent based methodologies do not work in his country. “Our land is often taken over for so-called development and when we shout slogans and protest we are thrown in jail or bashed up by police,” he told IDN asking not to name him. “I would like to learn how to communicate with grassroots government authorities in a less

confrontative manner," he added.

"Empowered youth are the engine of the progress we all seek," said Caitlin Wiesen, Chief of UNDP's Regional Policy and Programme Support for Asia and the Pacific, during her remarks at the opening ceremony. "Through our work, we are continuously reminded that young people today are more connected, more creative, more informed and more persuasive than any previous generation."

The UNDP has devised a Youth Strategy 2014-2017 to identify strategic entry points to SDGs for youth with social media playing a leading role. There was much discussion on the wave of legislation in the region that is shrinking the space available in cyberspace where young people express themselves.

"Liking and sharing on social media - while it raises awareness on issues, is a first step leading to action that brings change," said Samira Hassan, a youth organizer from Singapore who works with a community advocacy group for migrant rights at her school. "As young people, we need to start conversations about the social issues that we think are important," she added.

There were many sessions during the two days of workshops on marginalized groups, online freedoms and training for young human rights defenders. But, one wonders that if this is the same recipe that mobilized young people in the Arab world which led to the "Arab Spring" uprising and accompanying social and political chaos?

Peddling of such recipes were in abundance during a plenary session on the final day when a panel moderated by Daniel Fieller, UK Ambassador to Thailand and including four westerners, an African and an Asian based in Canada talked about "concrete actions and partnerships" where they were mainly talking about how to pitch project ideas for funding by them.

"We invest in research work with youth ... we play an advocacy role," said Perry Maddox of Restless Development. Manfred Horning of Heinrich Boll Foundation said "we fund on the ideas which young people bring to us not based on identity". At one point Ambassador Fieller argued that countries which are democratic and allow freedom of speech for its people will find it easier to achieve the SDGs, conveniently forgetting that countries in this region which have achieved

these goals already such as China, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea did not take that path to its success.

Thus, it was left to the African panelist, Layne Robinson, Head of Programs of the Youth Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat, to point out that governments are an important stakeholder in all this. "Lots of governments are trying to implement youth policies" he reminded the young participants, "you need to work with governments to get SDGs done, governments are critical to opening up space for young people".

Speaking to IDN at the end of the event, Weipeng Wang, a youth participant from China said that translating information into local languages is crucial for communicating the SDGs. "We have a lot of experience in writing blogs. We can write and share information through Wechat," he added.

Rejinel Valenua a youth from Philippines argued that it is not enough for only the youth to talk about these issues, lecturers at universities have to promote SDGs. "We need to dedicate a special day for C4S" he added.

The C4S has been an idea Restless Development brought to UNDP to be introduced to Asia, and UNDP has taken it up with UNESCO and UNFPA as well as another partner Forum-Asia to hold this event in Bangkok. Most of the funding came from the West.

UNDP's Wiessen said in the closing remarks that 50 of their partners will be holding another meeting to plan a strategy to take the C4S forward in the region. "We want to expand this shrinking (civil society) space for young people (in Asia). We want to create space for young people. We stand with you to oppose restrictive practices," she said.

After her closing remarks, one participant from an ASEAN (South East Asian) country who works with youth groups told IDN in disgust that the way the event was organized smacked of an European imperialistic initiative and it is not home driven. "This is a Restless Development project and they are pushing their agenda. This is not the way to do this in Asia," she said asking not to use her name. [IDN-InDepthNews - 20 December 2016]

Photo: Bangkok SDGs event | UNDP

Morocco Hosts the World's largest Solar Plant

By Fabíola Ortiz

MARRAKECH (IDN) - The ambitious Moroccan plan for harnessing heat coming from the sun in the Sahara desert and turning it into electricity has drawn international attention, also during the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP22), held in Marrakech, between November 7-18.

Two hundred kilometres Northeast drive from the COP22 venue lies the 450 hectares Noor solar complex. When it starts fully operating in 2018, it will power over one million households and curb 760,000 tons per year of greenhouse gas emissions.

The whole Moroccan capital city Rabat fits in this power station said to be the world's largest solar plant compared to the size of the European city of Barcelona. Noor is located at the desert town of Ouarzazate surrounded by the Atlas mountain range and its Berber villages. Named as the gate to the desert, Ouarzazate has also become the gate to tapping the solar energy.

"Since the world became aware in the Earth Summit Rio 92 (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) of the urgent need to address climate change, the Kingdom of Morocco has resolutely sought to ensure that its proactive policy of sustainable development and environmental protection is in line with the international community's global effort," said the Moroccan King Mohammed VI, at the COP21 in Paris when the world leaders agreed on a deal to curb greenhouse gas emissions and avoid the planet's warming by the end of the century.

Morocco receives about 3,000 hours of sunlight per year, being the Sahara desert a perfect place to harness the sun's rays. This North African



country enjoys no fossil fuel reserves and it relies almost exclusively on imports to meet its domestic requirements.

In line with the Twenty-Second Conference of Parties in Marrakech and as part of the responsibility of proving its green credentials with climate commitments, the Noor complex is part of Morocco's strategy to produce 42% of its power mix generated from renewable sources by 2020 – a goal that has been applauded by the UN.

Morocco publicized a series of constitutional, legislative and regulatory reforms. Energy transition has apparently become a top priority.

The country announced a US\$13 billion plan for expanding wind, solar and hydroelectric power generation to increase its share of renewables in less than a decade to come.

Currently, the \$9 billion Noor facilities generate 160 megawatts (MW). When the next two phases are completed and the solar turbines start running to its full potential, it is expected that Noor will generate more than 500MW. The next phases – Noor 2 and Noor 3 – are expected to begin their operations in 2017 and 2018.

To finance the mega structure, Morocco has secured loans of US\$519 million from the World Bank, 654 million euros from German bank KfW and partly from the African Development Bank, the European Commission and European Investment Bank.

The project is being developed by a consortium of the Moroccan Agency for Solar Energy (MASEN) together with ACWA Power – a developer, investor and operator owned by eight Saudi conglomerates and head-quartered in Saudi Arabia.

The company is currently operating in 11 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Southern Africa and South East Asia. The MASEN sells the electricity generated in Noor to the National Office for Electricity and Water.

“Morocco is making the best out of the resource it has, it has got sun and capability to develop industrial capacity. At the end of the day, we want to deliver stable and reliable electricity with a fix price and continuous supply for the next 25 years. It is fundamental for ground development and social wellbeing,” said Paddy Padmanathan, Chief Executive Officer of ACWA Power.

The power mega complex uses a technology called Concentrated Solar Power (CSP). Its costs are higher because of the use of lenses and mirrors rather than the broadly known photovoltaic panels that have usually lower installation costs. On the other hand, the CSP technology allows to store around eight hours of energy. That means saving energy to use at nights and in cloudy days.

“We take the heat of the sun and run the steam turbine. We don't need to use the electricity immediately because we are able to store it efficiently. That is the big advantage of the CSP system, it is much more versatile,” explained the civil engineer who has been the ACWA's CEO since 2006.

Padmanathan is of the view that setting up renewable plants in remote areas where there are usually places that tend to have the poorer standards of living conditions is a way of “revitalizing remote regions on the back of investments like this”.

“Morocco has demonstrated that you can deploy this type of project with scale. It is replicable if you use a transparent procurement process”, he told IDN.

Asked if it can inspire other developing countries, Padmanathan said countries like Jordan, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia have shown interest in the Noor plant. “We also received visits from Peru and Chile”, he recalled. Those two countries share the Atacama desert in South America with huge potential of harnessing the sunlight for power generation. [IDN-InDepthNews – 01 December 2016]

Photo: Noor 1: Currently the \$9 billion Noor facilities generate 160 megawatts (MW) | Fabiola Ortiz

Nepal Youths Make Sexual Health Services More Accessible

By Stella Paul

KATHMANDU (IDN) – 21-year old Pabitra Bhattarai is a shy young woman with a soft voice and a ready smile. But, ask her about sexual health services and the shyness vanishes in an instant as she speaks passionately of how youths of her country must have rights to such services.

“Our country runs on the shoulders of young people. So, we can’t risk having a country full of young people with HIV. We must have full access to sexual and reproductive health services (SRHR),” she says, suddenly sounding far more mature than her age.

Yet, rhetoric alone doesn’t define Bhattarai who is already counseling and making aware hundreds of youths – most of them high school students – in SRHR. “I have been to over 20 schools in Bhaktapur, Kirtipur and Lalitpur,” she says.

Youths for youths

On a late October morning, IDN catches up with Bhattarai and two other youths as they set out for a school to a government-run high school. The youths, trained and supported by Marie Stopes International (MSI) – a global organization working on SRHR – are part of a 10-member group called ‘Rocket and Space’ that aims to educate in and give access to SRHR to every youth of their city and region.

The youths try to flag down a taxi in Putali Sadak - a busy marketplace of Kathmandu. But soon they learn that there is a taxi strike in the city and the only vehicle available to them is a newspaper delivery van with no seats. This

however fails to dampen their spirits as they readily sit on the floor of the van and start, ready for an hour-long drive to a government-run high school in Baudha neighborhood.

They have been invited by the principal of the school, Bhattarai reveals, to speak with the students in 11th and 12th grade about sexual health and hygiene. “They think we can do it better (than them),” she says with a tinge of pride in her voice.

“No taboo” education

An hour later, the three youths tumble out of the van and enter a fortress-like building of the government-run school. Sitting in two semi-dark rooms of the 3 stories building are about a hundred adolescent boys and girls. While her male colleague Suraj meets the boys, Bhattarai and her female colleague Deepali Pradhan head for the girls room.

The school authorities have specially requested the volunteers to tell the girl students about menstrual hygiene, Pradhan informs. So, for next 45 minutes, the young women explain to their audience the process of menstruation: they start a conversation by asking the students what changes when they have their first periods.

The students typically look at each other and smile nervously. The youth workers encourage them to speak, saying, “Look, I am just like you, I am like your elder sister”. Slowly, a girl stands up and says “sprouting of breasts”. Bhattarai asks everyone to clap for student.

With that, the ice begins to melt.

For the next 45 minutes, Bhattarai and Pradhan touch upon all aspects of menstruation: the expected physical changes, the cramps, the menstrual cycle and how to count it and the importance of maintaining hygiene during this cycle. “Their family members and their teachers feel embarrassed to talk about these things. And the girls also feel shy to ask. But when we talk, they listen. They think, we are their friends,” Pradhan says.

In the boys’ room, Suraj Khadka, the young Rocket and Space member, talks about adolescence, physical attraction to the opposite sex, masturbation, condoms and the importance of safe sex.

Battling for the Disabled

Dan Bahadur is 19 years old and physically challenged. Since May this year, he has been educating fellow youths with disability in his city on SRHR.

There are 3 million people with disability in Nepal today, says Bahadur, and nearly half of them young. Not long ago, they were socially ostracized, he says: “People looked down upon the disabled. They were seen as people who brought bad luck to others.” Today, however, there are special facilities for people with disability, including quota in educational institutions and government jobs.

Yet, when it comes to sexual health, the disabled people, especially youths are normally forgotten. Bahadur wants to change that, but so far, the goal has remained a big



Photo: Youths of Rocket and Space group in Kathmandu brainstorm on how to make their presentations on Sexual and Reproductive Rights more effective | Stella Paul | IDN-INPS

challenge. "People laugh at me when I talk of SRHR. Some think it is weird and even ask me, "do disabled people have normal sexual needs?"

There are, however, a lot of people who give him support. Many of them are from people with disability themselves, including players from the national Wheelchair Basketball Association – an institution promoting and campaigning for sportspersons with disability. Bahadur has met several players, made them aware of their SRHR rights, including contraception, abortion, counseling on sexual health and hygiene.

Nilima Raut, MSI's Youth project manager explains, "The main slogan of the UN of Sustainable Development Goals itself is 'Leaving No One Behind' and in reaching out to disabled youths we are making an effort to achieve that."

Talking Sex in a conservative society

Here are, however, challenges galore as Nepali society is largely conservative where premarital sex is a taboo. Vinuka Basnet, a 20-year old college student says that her parents were shocked when they came to know she was working as a sexual health worker. "They were embarrassed and afraid that now everyone would point at me and say "she talks of sex". It took a long time for her to pursue her parents, she recalls.

Suraj Khadka says that since the school syllabus does not include sex education, students do not see his lessons as important enough. "They laugh and ask me questions that are irrelevant." He, however, has a solution: "Let them laugh, but encourage them

to ask what's relevant to them."

Others like Dan Bahadur often find communicating sexual health in their local language very challenging: "Take 'nightfall' for example. There are no synonyms for that in Nepali. Disabled youths who have spinal injury will have nightfall, but cannot feel it as they are paralyzed down the waist. It's important for them, as well as for those who care for them to know this, so they can maintain cleanliness. But when I try to explain this, I am at loss of words,"

Youth-friendly tools

But, since success of the youth SRHR educators depends on their communication with their fellow youths, they have formulated innovative ways to overcome the communication barriers.

Vinuka Basnet shows off some of the tools that include coloured pictures of male and female anatomy and reproductive organs, posters, brightly colored T-shirts and bracelets with slogans such as "No condom, no sex" and "I am a rock star".

They carry these tools with them at every meeting. While the posters and the pictures are used to educate the youths, the shorts and the bracelets are distributed among the attendees for positive and enthusiastic response.

Meeting the Unmet needs

Nepal legalized abortion in 2002 to achieve the MDG 5, the Millennium Development Goal 5 (to decrease maternal mortality by 134/10,000 by 2015). During the MDGs era (2000-2015), the country made significant progress and the mortality rate decreased

from 581/10,000 live births to 281/10,000 live births (National Demographic health survey, 2011).

Yet, latest statistics show that Nepal (27.5%) still has a very high unmet need for contraception in the Asia region. In terms of unmet need indicator, at least 14% and 12% of married or in-union women of reproductive age, in Southern Asia and South-Eastern Asia want to delay or avoid a pregnancy and are not able to do. Also, almost half the population is unaware that abortion is legal in the country.

This is where the youth health volunteers are making a big contribution, taking SRHR to the most vulnerable and needy sections of the society: migrant workers, slum dwellers and young women whose husbands have gone abroad to work as migrant workers.

23-year old Kavita Chulagani is a young mother whose husband works in the Middle East as a driver. Kavita uses vaginal implants as a contraceptive, which she received for free at a clinic run by Marie Stopes. "It would have been very difficult for me to access this," says the young mother who lives in a slum in the city outskirts, "but the youth workers directed me to this place. Now I am telling women of my neighborhood to come here too," she says.

According to Raut, there has been over 100% increase in the demand for SRHR services since the youth project started. "There are still a lot of people to reach, but the increasing demand gives us hope," she concludes.

[IDN-InDepthNews – 24 November 2016]

Why Women Matter for Effective Climate Change Solutions

By Fabíola Ortiz

MARRAKECH (IDN) – Establishing a clear path forward and including women and girls in global efforts on climate change were some of the biggest challenges the delegations and non-state actors faced at the latest United Nations Climate Change Conference in Marrakech.

Formally known as the Twenty-Second Conference of Parties (COP22), the conference had a special day (November 14) for discussing exclusively gender issues within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

“Study after study has shown that women are the most vulnerable to climate change and that’s why there is a need for strong leadership on this issue,” said UNFCCC Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa.

“We need to prioritise women’s demands and offer the proper responses to climate change,” Mariam Diallo-Dramé, President of the Association of Women Leaders and Sustainable Development (AFLED) told IDN. AFLED is based in Bamako, Mali, and works to empower girls and young women between the ages of 15 and 35.

Diallo-Dramé explained that because adaptation to climate change is inextricably related to access to education, climate adaptation must therefore also envision a holistic solution of educating women and sending girls to school. “We work to empower girls’ citizenship and to involve them in decision-making, we encourage them to be part of political scenario in Mali,” she said.

Women in the Sahel region are responsible for the well-being of the family, often having to walk long distances to fetch water and food on unsafe roads, she noted, adding that “resources are rare in the Sahara region, and most of the time men leave women to farm. They have their own traditional methods for adaptation, but it is not enough, they need help.”

As an African voice advocating for gender issues to be included in the climate talks in Marrakech, Diallo-Dramé regretted that this issue was not being properly addressed in the negotiations.

“I have the feeling that in those high-level meetings we, African women from the Sahel, are going to stay behind because we are not there at the table. We are not able to address the gender issue in our coun-



tries, governments don’t understand, all legislation regarding gender and human rights is just on paper and is not being implemented. When you talk about climate justice it is going to be for the West and not for us,” she said.

For the last two weeks at COP22 (November 7-18, 2016), country delegations negotiated implementation of the new global agreement to tackle climate change adopted in Paris in 2015. The Paris Agreement embraces a language sensitive to gender equality and recognises Parties’ responsibility to respect and promote human rights obligations through climate change action calling for “gender-responsive adaptation measures and capacity-building activities”.

In Marrakech, Parties were expected to carry on with the Lima Work Programme on Gender – which is a two-year work programme on gender launched at COP20 in 2014. Civil society groups had strongly

advocated a clear plan of action on gender within the UNFCCC and financial support for the activities under the Lima Work Programme.

“We start from the point that we are not victims, we are advancing now on the discourse of empowerment,” Maité Rodríguez Blandón, coordinator for the Guatemala Foundation in the Central American country, told IDN.

“Climate resilience will come from empowering women in their communities. Women are very well organised at the local level and they know their role. We focus on changing the perception from being a victim to becoming a key actor and protagonist for change.” Blandón leads the Women and Peace Network in Central America with grassroots women’s organisations from Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Honduras. Her work has focused on grassroots women’s movements struggling for land rights, women’s rights and safer cities for women over the past decade. She said that there was too much dialogue and not enough action at COP22.

“We have seen an increasing participation of indigenous and women’s groups that used to be unthinkable in the past. The Lima Work Programme on Gender was very short and you don’t see the mention of women empowerment in the text. It has evolved with no doubt, we have achieved higher levels of consciousness, but we don’t want to be at the periphery. We need to see more concrete actions”, she stressed.

Engaging indigenous women’s voices has also been a concern for Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples. “Indigenous women have a very important role because they are the ones who are really involved in subsistence low-carbon food production. They are the ones who take care of the environment within their territories. Their role is to really ensure that the biodiversity is sustained,” she told IDN.

Tauli-Corpuz believes that COP22 did have a strong gender focus. “Women are here to make sure that their rights will also be addressed in the decisions being reached. Indigenous women are the strong allies for climate change solutions, they should be at the core of the discussions,” she said.

Civil society organisations and non-state actors had a crucial role in COP22, Driss El Yazami, Head of the Civil Society Team at the conference and President of the National Human Rights Council of Morocco, told IDN.

“Women’s groups from several countries gathered here to lay the first foundations of an African Network of Women for Climate Justice. Reaching the Paris Agreement was itself influenced by civil society and non-state actors. The Paris Agreement recognises the important engagement of the various actors, including non-governmental organisations,” she added.

Around 1,500 local and regional leaders representing more than 780 local and regional governments from 114 countries gathered in Marrakech and launched a roadmap for action to start a global campaign to localise climate finance in 2017 and implement a ‘Global Action Framework for Localising Climate Finance’ by 2020. [IDN-InDepthNews – 18 November 2016]

Photo: Fabiola Ortiz | IDN-INPS

UN's New Development Agenda Assigns a Key Role for Youth

By Rodney Reynolds

UNITED NATIONS (IDN) - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who has continued to reiterate the key role to be played by youth in the implementation of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, points out that many young people across the world have been disproportionately affected by economic crises and recession.

"As torch bearers of the new development agenda, you have a critical role to play in ending poverty, inequality, hunger and environmental degradation. Your actions will be central in ushering in an era in which no one is left behind," he told a gathering of youth.

And globally, over 73 million youth are unemployed, according to recent UN statistics.

Still, the world now has more young people than ever before in human history: nearly 46 per cent of the world's population is under 25. Africa and the Middle East have the highest proportion of young people - around 60 per cent of the population, says Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson.

"This presents a unique opportunity for developing innovative solutions for peace and development," according to Elisasson.

Against this backdrop, Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and Earth Charter International (ECI) sponsored a timely UN panel discussion on "Youth Boosting and Implementation of SDGs," which was attended by nearly 100 representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), youth delegates, diplomats and senior UN officials.

Hosted by the Sri Lanka Mission to the United Nations, the discussion took place at the UN Secretariat on November 10.

The panel consisted of Dr. David Nabarro, UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda; Ambassador Sabarullah Khan, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations; Saskia Schellekens, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and Sofia Garcia of SOS Children's Villages.

The discussion was moderated by Maher Nasser, Director, Outreach Division of the UN's Department of Public Information (DPI).

In his opening remarks, Dr. Nabarro stressed the universality of the 2030 Agenda, and emphasized that young people must be part of

sustainable development. He singled out the significance of youth as carriers of the message of the SDGs to the world, and the instrumentality of the new technology in that process.

Reiterating the priority given to youth by his government, Ambassador Sabarullah Khan said as Sri Lanka is poised to implement the 2030 Agenda at the national level, it has kept women, youth, children and persons with disabilities at the centre of its national plans, in keeping with the Agenda's key vision 'leaving no one behind'.

He said youth has a unique role to play in realizing the SDGs and that the Government of Sri Lanka is well aware of this role. He added that the foremost role that youth can play in supporting the achievement of SDGs would be to bring its message to a larger global audience.

Ambassador Khan observed that Sri Lanka had seen the positive effect of mobilizing youth in this awareness campaign.

He said that though there are several obstacles that affect the full involvement of youth in realizing the SDGs, those obstacles could be overcome by empowering youth through education, skills development and focus on innovation.

He pointed out that Sri Lanka has developed inclusive strategies on promoting education and skills training for youth. He further stated that having realized the importance of skills development for youth, Sri Lanka was instrumental in declaring July 15 as the World Youth Skills Day.

Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth Saskia Schellekens thanked Sri Lanka for the prominent role it plays at the United Nations in advancing youth issues. She also stressed the importance of raising awareness of the SDGs and mobilizing youth for that purpose. She added that it is imperative to strengthen the Ministries of Youth as a means of empowering youth.

Sofia Garcia of SOS Children's Villages spoke on the importance of including young people in the decision-making structures in respect of the SDGs.

The quality of childhood sets the stage for our future development - both as individuals and societies, says SOS Children's Villages

International, based in Vienna.

The organization says that “all children count, but not all children are counted”. It advocates the inclusion of children in the national and international monitoring systems for SDGs. “Yet unacceptable data gaps remain for the inclusion of these children,” it warns

A concept paper prepared by SGI and ECI, released ahead of the panel discussion, said implementing and achieving the SDGs require active participation of civil society, in particular the younger generations.

Global challenges addressed by the goals not only seriously impact the youth today, but also will affect their future. In addition, young people are fluent in technological and social media tools, which could be utilized to promote the SDGs and encourage initiatives that support them.

The important role of youth in achieving SDGs are underscored in Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which declares: “What we are announcing today – an Agenda for global action for the next 15 years – is a charter for people and planet in the twenty-first century.”

“Children and young women and men are critical agents of change and will find in the new Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world.”

The event also saw the launching of the new mobile app ‘Maping’: an interactive app developed by two youth representatives from SGI and ECI, which aims at educating and engaging youth on SDGs.

Launching the new App, Tadashi Nagai, Program Officer for Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Affairs at SGI and co-project manager of Maping, told the meeting: “We are delighted to have this opportunity to launch our App named Maping here at United Nations.”

He said the project was started in January to coincide with the start of the implementation of SDGs, but took 10 months to develop it.

Meanwhile, other Apps for promoting SDGs such as “SDGs in Action” produced by UN have emerged, but “we hope that Maping can complement them in terms of raising awareness among ordinary people, especially youth, at the grassroots level”.

A visual presentation was made, along with the participation of ECI’s Dino De Francesco, co-project manager of Maping. [IDN-InDepthNews – 13 November 2016]

Photo: An overview of the SGI-EIC event at the UN | Tsuneo Yabusaki



Faith Leaders Play Crucial Role in Disaster Risk Reduction

By Jaya Ramachandran

GENEVA (IDN) - Representatives of faith-based organizations (FBOs), United Nations agencies, NGOs and academic institutions have stressed the need for engaging with local faith communities to reduce vulnerability to disaster risk, listening to and taking into account the voices especially of women who are often worst affected.

A round-table ahead of the International Day of Disaster Reduction observed on October 13 also pleaded for supporting local faith communities with local disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities, and maximizing the contribution of FBOs, by 'using' their spiritual capital.

The round-table further appealed for working actively to remove the deeply rooted belief that disasters are a God given punishment, ensuring that places of worship are prepared to respond to disasters, improving the role of faith leaders as communicators.

The discussion was organised on October 10 at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, by Soka Gakkai International (SGI), the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (JLIF&LC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). It focussed on 'The contribution of FBOs to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction'.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai Framework) is a 15-year (2015-2030), voluntary, non-binding agreement. It was endorsed by the UN General Assembly following the 2015 Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR). It aims

at the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.

Denis McLean from the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) said that faith-based networks represent an invaluable 'spiritual capital'. In Tacloban, Philippines, during the Typhoon that killed 6000 people in December 2013, he recalled, faith institutions were the main providers of support to empower individuals in finding the necessary strength to cope with their loss.

The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR's Jose Riera-Cezanne emphasized that the role played by faith leaders, religious institutions and FBOs in providing resilience in the face of hardship and adversity has acquired remarkable recognition in the humanitarian communities.

Religious actors in fact often enjoy special trust. They speak to people's hearts and minds, and are able to change attitudes and behaviours. They also play a part in public welfare in places where national institutions and service-delivery are weak. Churches, mosques, and other places of worship often serve as forums for people to talk about what is on their minds and to share messages on matters of interest to the entire community.

Riera-Cezanne said UNHCR offices were already partnering with faith-based or faith-inspired service-delivery NGOs, local faith

communities and religious leaders. This cooperation is likely to grow in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A key question for the UN partners has been how can the resources these organizations bring to the table – human, financial and spiritual – be better understood and more effectively tapped by all of those working to serve the very same communities.

The red lines that could impede cooperation with faith-based actors, if crossed, include behaviours such as, antagonism towards or exclusion of members of other faith backgrounds; incitement to violence directed against individuals or communities of another faith; proselytism and pressure to convert as a pre-condition for continued support; early marriage, gender stereotypes and stigma and discrimination.

The huge rise in the number of refugees and displaced people in the Middle East sparked off both interest in and concerns about the roles played by faith leaders, faith-based organizations and local faith communities in providing protection and assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers, said Riera-Cezanne.

In fact this prompted the then UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, the incoming UN Secretary-General, to devote his annual Dialogue on Protection Challenges in 2012 to the topic of "Faith and Protection".

Dinesh Suna of the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN), an initiative of the World

Council of Churches shared the good practice of CASA (Church's Auxiliary for Social Action, a member of ACT Alliance and WCC). In 1999 Super Cyclone hit Orissa and over 10,000 people died. CASA had been involved in the process of Community Based Disaster Preparedness and mitigation and played a proactive role in raising awareness in the community.

Christophe Arnold of ACT Alliance explained the role played by faith leaders in the Ebola Response. During the crisis, one of the main challenges was the high level of stigma and fear from doctors' messages. People didn't believe in them and kept on using the same burial practices through which Ebola was spreading more easily.

Olivia Wilkinson of JLIF&LC shared evidence-based insight into Local Faith Communities (LFCs) and religious engagement in humanitarian response. LFCs overcome vulnerability through the strength of their already established community networks and their ability to use this sense of community to build resiliency.

The spiritual context of disaster should not be ignored as it is an important part of understanding risk perception, said Wilkinson. By engaging with local faith communities these perceptions can be better understood and help strengthen the relevance and appropriateness of Disaster risk Reduction interventions. For instance, in the Philippines, the training of local pastors in preparedness and risk reduction was a key component to overcome the sense of vulnerability. Following Typhoon Haiyan, many local pastors were highly involved in leading preparedness and risk reduction efforts in their local communities. The trainings were reflections of their thinking, intertwined with technical knowledge from DRR, scriptural learning and inspiration to provide a holistic conception of disaster risk reduction.

Nobuyuki Asai of SGI said that after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 and the Kumamoto Earthquake in April 2016, Soka Gakkai in Japan accommodated thousands of people in its community centers and provided relief supplies. One truck with relief supply left a neighboring prefecture for an affected area only one hour after the earthquake occurred and the promptness of the response was very helpful for affected communities.

Many SGI members voluntarily engaged in relief activities and in supporting the shelters both in Soka Gakkai centers and other community centers. People affected by the earthquake reported that these centers were particularly welcoming because of the care provided by SGI members to all individuals without any distinction.

Sasiwat Wongsinsawat from Permanent Mission of Thailand to the UN remarked that although FBOs are not mentioned directly in the Sendai Framework, the key role of civil society is underlined. Churches, mosques and Buddhist temples are among the oldest institutions having ties with communities and they can protect people and reduce sufferings.

In the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the monks and nuns of the Buddhist temples displayed leadership, gave news about missing people and temples turned into shelters, giving relief and psychological support for instance to deepen the understanding about life and death. After the 2011 earthquake in Japan, the Thai Buddhist temple near Narita airport provided support and was also used as a storage and distribution centre. [IDN-InDepthNews - 09 November 2016]



Photo: Roundtable | Nobuyuki Asai | SGI

Sustainable Development at Risk in E. Europe, Central Asia

By Jaya Ramachandran



BERLIN | BRUSSELS (IDN) - Unless adequate steps are taken with relentless determination, the core objective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed by all member states of the United Nations in September 2015, which recommend that “no one be left behind”, will not be achieved in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

This is the crux of a United Nations report titled ‘Progress at Risk’, published on October 12 in Brussels. Goals 8 and 10 of the SDGs – aiming to “promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all” and “reduce inequality within and among countries” – are being ignored.

With 37 million people in informal or vulnerable jobs – the equivalent of a third of the working population – social safety nets in Eastern Europe, Turkey and Central Asia are increasingly coming under threat, says the report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) covering this region.

The report shows that, while some 80 million people (out of a total population of 230 million) have joined the middle class since 2001, low commodity prices and slow growth in the European Union and the Russian Federation are making it harder for many people to find decent employment or access basic services such as health and education.

The study sees women, migrant workers, the youth and ethnic minorities such as the Roma particularly at risk of falling behind. “Women, for example, are 30 percent less likely to be employed than men, but perform two and a half times more unpaid domestic work.”

Furthermore, AIDS-related deaths have tripled over the last 15 years, in part because prevention and treatment have failed to reach the most marginalized.

“Many of these problems reflect discrimination and exclusion that are not captured in official statistics,” declares the report. In fact, World Bank and Transparency International survey data cited in the report indicate that many people believe in the existence of a two-speed justice system, while a third of respondents said they have paid bribes to get treated medically.

Taking up a rather sensible issue that is often side-lined, Cihan Sultanoğlu, the Director of UNDP’s Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) said: “Many countries in this region used to enjoy relative job security, free and universal access to social services and smaller gender inequalities. But with vulnerability and exclusion on the rise, they are starting to resemble societies in other parts of the world.”

The report refers to yet another significant aspect of economic life when it points out that due to misinvoiced foreign trade transactions nearly US\$65 billion in annual illicit financial flows leaves the region annually. “By capturing even a small fraction of these funds, governments in Eastern Europe, Turkey and Central Asia could invest huge amounts back into creating jobs, expanding social safety nets and closing the gender gap,” says the report.

Such investments would also help countries of the region implement the global development finance agenda agreed in Addis Ababa in July 2015, which identified increases in domestic resources – including reductions in illicit financial flows – as key to funding sustainable development.

Financing questions are emerging as a major concern in national efforts to implement the sustainable development goals by 2030.

Against this backdrop, Sultanoğlu said: “This report is coming at the right time. Many countries around the world are implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recommend that no one be left behind. If we can invest in bringing the most excluded and vulnerable groups up to speed, we will increase the prospects of reaching the SDGs in the region by 2030.”

The UNDP report calls for cutting the region’s high labour taxes to encourage formal employment, where social protection coverage and workers’ rights are more secure. In addition, alleviating social care and domestic work could improve education, employment, and earnings opportunities for women. This could in turn accelerate economic growth and improve levels of well-being for everyone, says the report.

In addition, increasing national tax receipts, capturing illicit capital flows and imposing higher taxes on economic activities that burden the environment—such as the extraction and processing of non-renewable fossil fuels—could increase budget revenues and help make the transition to greener economies and more equal societies.

The report also calls for improving the ability of statistical offices to gather reliable and independent data on inequalities, but also to respond to the needs of vulnerable groups more effectively. Such efforts would require more extensive public administration and civil service reforms, says the report. [IDN-InDepthNews – 13 October 2016]

Photo: Vladimer Vaishvili | UNDP Georgia

Arctic Circle Assembly in Iceland Discusses Sustainability

By Lowana Veal

REYKJAVIK (IDN) - With over 2,000 participants, including 400 speakers, the fourth Arctic Circle Assembly in Iceland's capital Reykjavik was a hive of activity and networking on everything to do with the Arctic. The event has become the largest Arctic event globally.

The concept of the gathering October 7-9 was devised by Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, who until a few months ago had been President of Iceland and had put considerable time into Arctic matters and climate change. Grimsson still plays a central role in the Assembly.

The event consisted of a number of plenary sessions coupled with a large number of seminars, otherwise known as breakout sessions. This year, Scottish Prime Minister Nicola Sturgeon and outgoing UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had also been invited to give presentations.

Although Scotland is not considered an Arctic country, Sturgeon pointed out that the north of Scotland is actually closer to the Arctic than to London. Scotland passed its Climate Change Act in 2009, she said. "Scotland has reduced energy use by almost a sixth since 1990... we see big opportunities for Scotland in areas such as renewable heat and developing the circular economy," she told Assembly participants.

"When our Climate Change Act was passed 7 years ago, 28% of Scotland's electricity demand was met by renewable power. Last year, the figure was 57%," she continued.

Sturgeon talked about the establishment of a

Climate Justice Fund in Scotland, because "the individuals affected by climate change are often the very young, the very old, the ill, and the very poor. Women are suffering disproportionately, since they are often the main providers of food, fuel and water".

Ban Ki-moon was awarded the Arctic Circle Prize for his leadership in international climate diplomacy, as he has emphasized climate change during his 10 years at the UN despite political opposition at the time he took up his position.

"As we are all keenly aware, the Arctic is melting before our eyes. There is a steep decline in sea ice. On one single day last month (September), the Arctic ice cap melted at three times its normal rate, losing ice the size of England.... The Arctic is Ground Zero for climate change," he told the Assembly.

"Indigenous peoples are also affected by national strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation, especially renewable energy initiatives such as windmill farms and hydropower projects, which often take place on indigenous peoples' territories... their contributions are essential to help us achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and combat Climate Change," he added.

In one breakout session, Paolo Ruti from the WMO said that September is predicted to be ice-free in the Arctic sometime between 2040 and 2070. The WMO has designated the period between mid-2017 and mid-2019 as Year of Polar Prediction in order to improve

predictive capabilities.

Summing up that session, Bjorn Dahlback from the Swedish Polar Research Secretariat pointed out that synoptic data is missing, whereby the same parameters are measured at the same time in separate places.

One of the plenary sessions focused on the issues of sea ice and permafrost. Phil Duffy from Woods Hole Research Center told the audience that not only is the Greenland Ice Sheet melting, but also as the ice melts it absorbs more sunlight and the surface gets warmer.

Jennifer Francis from Rutgers University Institute of Marine and Coastal Sciences said that half the sea ice in the Arctic has melted. This makes the Arctic darker, which means that the amount of sunlight being reflected back into Space is reduced and consequently the Earth is absorbing an increasing amount of solar energy, leading to warming. "And when the Arctic warms up, the Gulf Stream becomes weaker," she said.

Later in the session, Duffy said that the need for CO2 removal is vital for policy. Carbon restoration in biological systems is important, which is done by restoring wetlands, forests and certain kinds of agricultural practices. His colleague Sue Natali, a permafrost researcher, pointed out that "numbers reported by scientists are conservative. Scientists don't report unknowns". William Moomaw from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy ended the

session with the words “Do whatever you can in your own country.”

Two themes, renewable energy and Inuit communities, kept coming up again and again at the Arctic Circle.

In a plenary session called ‘Meeting the challenges of sustainable development in the Arctic’, Danish MP for Greenland Aaja Chemnitz told the audience: “Sustainability in the Arctic should focus much more on the indigenous angle.”

In the same session, Carter Roberts from WWF said, “The framework for sustainability in the Arctic is the sustainability goals.... For the first time, the sustainable development goals on poverty, hunger, climate, food production, life under the sea and life on land are important additions to the millennium development goals.”

One plenary session focused on an Arctic renewable energy network, exploring the need to fill in the gaps currently provided by fossil fuels with renewable energy. One aspect of this is to link countries by means of electrical grids, but although this is technically feasible there might be political barriers and a lack of popular support.

A number of breakout sessions also touched on renewable energy. One looked at the potential for geothermal in the Arctic, focusing on replacing dirty diesel generators with the direct use of geothermal in Canada’s northern territories and Alaska, while other sessions looked at the challenges and logistics of providing renewable energy to remote communities in Greenland and Canada.

Kare Hendriksen from Denmark’s Technical University said that in Greenland, 60% of energy comes from five hydropower plants. Although many settlements have limited potential for hydropower, each of the 73 towns has to be self-sufficient in energy, water and other infrastructure as there are no roads between towns.

Other speakers noted that the same is true for many Inuit communities in northern Canada. In Canada, 2,000 communities are not linked to others via grids. Housing and energy costs are also higher in remote areas. “But energy costs can be reduced drastically by good design,” says architect Larry Cash.

Gwen Holdmann from the Alaska Center for Energy and Power, told participants at a session on cold climate technologies that Alaska has done a lot to integrate renewable technologies in order to displace diesel fuel.

Solar, wind and hydro plants are used, while one geothermal plant uses 72°C hot water because “that’s all that’s available”. However, it is important to train local operators: “Equipment sometimes fails because it isn’t designed to operate in remote grids of about 5,000 people,” she explained.

At the Reykjavik assembly, Quebec and Iceland signed an agreement to strengthen scientific cooperation in clean, sustainable energy. Like Iceland, Quebec derives most of its electricity from renewables – in its case hydropower – and another Arctic Circle gathering will take place there December 13-15, focusing on sustainable development in northern regions.

At a breakout session looking at climate change, species dispersal and fisheries, Hordur Saevaldsson from the University of Akureyri said that three new species – Atlantic mackerel, Scandinavian herring and blue whiting – had become established in Icelandic waters since 1996, while others such as capelin have decreased. [IDN-InDepthNews – 16 October 2016]



Photo: UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (second from left) with Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, former President of Iceland, on his left.

Laos Adds SDG18 to Handle Unexploded American Bombs

By Kalinga Seneviratne

VIENTIANE (IDN) - U.S. President Barack Obama's early September visit to Laos helped to focus attention on one of the most horrendous war crimes in history, the bombing of the small landlocked Southeast Asian country during the Indochina War in the 1960s and 1970s, and its massive human and development costs.

The Laotians made use of the visit of both Obama and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon for the ASEAN and East Asia Summits to launch their own Sustainable Development Goal 18 to reduce the impact of unexploded ordnance (UXO) on development and economic activities.

SDG 18 is the newest addition to a set of 17 globally agreed goals which form the core of a new sustainable development agenda that came into effect at the beginning of the year, according to press release from the United Nations in the Lao PDR. The Lao PDR, together with all other 192 UN member states, endorsed the SDGs at the General Assembly in New York in September 2015 and has since made inroads in incorporating them into national plans and policies.

Laotian Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and Ban Ki-moon inaugurated Lao's own national SDG on September 7 at a special side event during the Summit meetings. Speaking at the event, the UN Secretary-General noted that more than half of the casualties caused by UXO in Laos in recent years have been children, most often young boys.

"With SDG 18, we aim to put an end to this horrible trend, once and for all. The socio-economic impact of UXO contamination means that people lack confidence in the safety of their land, which in turn has negative impacts on the income of rural farmers and their families and inhibits the development of the whole country" said Ban Ki-Moon.

He added: "I welcome the government's commitment to free its people from UXO, with a powerful tool like a national SDG which will make sure efforts are coordinated for full impact."

Laos has the distinction of being one of the most heavily bombed nations in the world. From 1964 to 1973, the country suffered some of the heaviest aerial bombardment in world history.

In the nine years, more than 500,000 bombing missions, mainly by



the U.S. Air Force, dropped more than two million tons of ordnance, or nearly one ton for every man, woman and child in the population at the time.

Most of these were anti-personnel cluster bomblets intended to explode on or shortly after impact, but the failure rate according to UN's estimates, may have been as high as 30 percent. As a result, more than 40 years after the end of the war, UXOs still affects 15 of the 18 provinces.

The National UXO Socio- Economic Impact Survey conducted in 1996-97 found that 86 of the 133 districts in the country (or 25 percent of all villages) reported continued UXO contamination

An estimated 80 million cluster sub-munitions remain unexploded. UXO limits safe access to agricultural and land for development projects and makes construction of transport and power infrastructure, schools, hospitals and water supply facilities much more costly and dangerous. It is for this reason, that the Lao government assigns an own national Sustainable Development Goal, Goal 18.

“We see casualties predominantly in rural areas and among the poorest populations. That is the linkages to poverty,” explained Nils Christensen, Head of UXO and Poverty Unit at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Laos in an interview with IDN-INPS.

“When you do development in rural areas this is a challenge by itself. When farmers are working on the field there could be bombs underground so very direct risk to their livelihood and also development activities,” he added.

Ever since the end of the Indochina War in 1975, Laos has been struggling to clear the land of UXOs. Initially, affected farmers and communities did it themselves at great risk to their lives.

The support of international charities and specialized international NGOs came much later, because this war on Laos was known as the “secret war” of the Pentagon, kept hidden by the international media. Even most American people did not know of the war crimes committed by their government supposedly to stop Vietcong supply lines via Laos to Vietnam.

In 1996, the Government of Lao, with UNDP’s support, established a national operator to address the problem of remaining UXOs. This became the backbone of the country’s efforts to rid itself of these remnants of war. In the past 20 years, UXO Lao has cleared more than 300 square kilometers of land for safe use, destroyed more than 1.3 million UXO and made more than 11,000 visits to villages to teach communities about the risks of unexploded bombs.

“SDG 18 gives us a clear goal to work towards,” argues Christensen, a Danish national. “We have tried to set some ambitious targets, for example we would like to reduce casualties to the minimum levels possible.”

He pointed out that there are casualties every year in Laos. “I believe this year more than 40 already ... we want to work towards that to say there shouldn’t be any casualties,” he added.

As a first step in implementing SDG 18, the Lao government is planning to carry out a comprehensive national survey of UXO contamination, which will help to target clearance work in high-risk areas and reduce the number of casualties.

The challenge for UNDP and the Lao government is to prioritize the areas they need to work in, argues Christensen. “If we find out that contamination is very big near a village we must prioritize that before going to the mountains where nobody lives,” he explained. “Priority is where people live where they have their livelihood where contamination is a risk to human life, human activity.”

The UXO Sector, supported by the UNDP, adopted a new, evidence-based UXO survey approach in 2015, which has resulted in a considerable increase in the number of cluster munitions cleared per hectare of land; from fewer than 7 cluster munitions per hectare in 2014 to more than 22 cluster munitions per hectare in 2015.

The new survey approach entails consultation with communities to identify all known UXO in and around villages, followed by technical survey to establish the extent of each Confirmed Hazardous Area, which is then entered into the national database and prioritized for clearance.

Getting appropriate technology to work in a difficult terrain is the biggest challenge for the Lao UXO clearance projects argues Christensen. “We need to detect UXOs down to 25 cm diameter,” he noted. “We will need a variety of equipment, because it all depends on terrain, in certain areas soil is difficult for equipment.”

Laos has also been a leading advocate for the Convention on Cluster Munitions, an international agreement which entered into force in 2010, obliging State Parties to clear contaminated areas, destroy stockpiles and provide assistance to victims of cluster munitions accidents. [IDN-In-DepthNews – 05 October 2016]

Photo: Artificial limbs at the UXO Information Centre In Vientiane made in Laos for people whose limbs were blown off by the Unexploded American bombs | Kalinga Seneviratne | IDN-IPS

People Key to Ecuador's Sustainable Development Goals

By Nelsy Lizarazo

QUITO (IDN) - I visited San Pablo 15 years ago and it was clearly the poorest neighbourhood of Portoviejo, the regional capital of Manabí Province.

Then, there was no drinking water. Families could not even imagine the possibility of free basic education for all, and secondary education even less. You could not walk on the streets after 5 in the evening and the health centre had neither sufficient medical staff nor medicine to cover the neighbourhood's needs.

I returned to San Pablo at the beginning of September this year. There I met Monica, a 29-year-old single mother of an 8-year-old daughter. Six months earlier – and against all macho traditions – she won the presidency of the neighbourhood council. Today she is Madam President and works tirelessly day in and day out for her neighbours.

With total conviction, she told me: “Without the progress over the last ten years, we wouldn't have achieved access to education for our boys and girls, we wouldn't have the medical attention that we have, we wouldn't have obtained drinking water for the entire area, or the attention and opportunities for the disabled that they deserve.

“I don't have to tell you that our lives have changed: you only have to come to San Pablo to see for yourself.”

Monica knows that her life and that of the large majority of her neighbours has changed. Maybe she does not know that behind these changes there have been clear decisions to prioritise social policies, particularly in the fields of health and education.

She probably does not know either that these social policies were linked to the Millennium Development Goals – the MDGs – that were adopted by Ecuador and integrated over the last 12 years into the bigger picture for the country's public policy strategy: the National Good Living Plan.

It is thanks to that political decision, reflected in social investment, concrete programmes and action that Ecuador managed to present indicators that more than surpassed the goals in 20 of the 21 MDGs “ahead of time and to a standard greater than agreed”, in the words of President Rafael Correa during his speech to the Sustainable

Development Summit convened by the United Nations in September 2015.

Likewise, the government committed itself to achieving 68 percent of the only goal not yet achieved – reduction in maternal mortality – by the end of the year.

Monica certainly does not know all these details, but she is experiencing what these achievements means to her people every day.

That Rafael Correa's government can present such positive results with regard to the MDGs would seem to be a paradox. This is the same government that in Correa's presidential acceptance speech in 2007 strongly criticised these objectives, affirming that there had been no discussion at all of the enormous and historical, social and economic asymmetry on the planet.

This point was repeated time and time again in different international fora and by different official government spokespersons of the so-called “Citizen's Revolution”.

One of these was Pabel Muñoz, who was National Secretary for Planning until very recently. He is on record as saying the MDGs “were set as targets by the North for the South and did not involve local stakeholders, be they governments, civil society organisations or citizens of the country's regions”.

Today this critical position on the MDGs has turned into acceptance and optimism regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

According to official government representatives, a clear regard for action linked to the redistribution of income and wealth have now been incorporated into these goals. Indeed, speaking at the Sustainable Development Summit, the same Pabel Muñoz said that the SDGs and their aims “are consistent with our [Ecuadorian] development plan.”

In fact, the SDGs incorporate issues and goals that have been contemplated and served as key to the country's National Good Living Plan for 2013-2017: poverty reduction, gender equality and climate change, for example.

For her part, the former minister for social development coordination, Cecilia Vaca Jones, has explained how nine of the 17 SDGs are



directly related to social policy and, unlike the MDGs, are closely related to the achievement of equality and equity, which she understands as meaning a closer focus on the development proposal that underpins the country's public policy.

On defining the country's priorities with regard to the SDGs and clearly reflecting them in the budget for 2016, Vaca Jones said that every effort aimed at guaranteeing quality education (SDG 4) will be maintained and deepened to ensure the criteria of inclusion and equity.

Moreover, as has been shown in previous years, a central issue is the eradication of poverty in all its forms (SDG 1) and this will continue to be an issue for the current government. In addition, the already-started task of ensuring sustainable consumption and production, as set out in SDG 12, will continue.

In several official speeches, government spokespersons have highlighted the country's interest in progressing towards the achievement of all goals linked to the environment, in line with the country's Constitution and recognition of the "rights of nature".

How the country will advance towards achievement of the SDGs is an interesting question and the answer can be built around four central elements which are those that were applied in the last decade to obtain the results that have already been achieved.

Firstly, a firm and clear fiscal policy. Social contracts are not possible without fiscal contracts and a large part of the social investment that has been done in the country has been possible thanks to the collection of taxes.

This policy must be sustained and deepened, working continuously to raise public awareness. It is essential that the people understand clearly that the payment of taxes is positively reflected in reduction of the gaps and inequity that still exists in the country.

Secondly, so-called anti-cyclic policies. In critical moments of the economic cycle, social investment should not be reduced. This policies is based on the principle that the greater the social investment, the greater the possibility for productivity, growth and exit from the crisis.

Thirdly, the strengthening of work in local areas and working directly with groups that have been historically excluded and with groups in need of priority attention.

Finally, a concept that has guided public administration over the last decade: namely, supporting human beings and their capacities as the primary and main resource for development.

The key to achieve the aims proposed in the SDGs lies in supporting the capacities of people like Monica, the residents of San Pablo, and communities across the country.

Nelsy Lizarazo is President of Pressenza International Press Agency. [IDN-InDepthNews - 12 September 2016]

Photo: Rafael Correa, President of Ecuador, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly's seventieth session on 28 September 2015 at the United Nations in New York | Kim Haughton | UN Photo

UN Gears Up to Help Lesotho End Poverty

By Majara Molupe



MASERU (IDN) - The United Nations in Lesotho is set to help the Mountain Kingdom implement Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in particular Goal One: End Poverty in all its manifestations, including extreme poverty, over the next 15 years in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda, comprising 17 Goals approved by UN member states on September 25, 2015.

Sylvia Tiisetso Khabele, the UN Volunteer on UN Communications told IDN that the key priorities of the world body's work on SDGs in 2016 include strengthening national capacities and those of the UN system for implementation of the Agenda 2030.

"We will support the Government in finalization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Report, also reflecting lessons learned and how these can be considered in translating the SDGs into reality," she explained.

The 2015 Lesotho Annual UN Country Results Report indicates that although the country was recently upgraded to Middle Income Country (MIC) status, poverty and inequality continue to be chronic

challenges: 57.1% of the population lives in poverty, with poverty more prevalent in the rural areas.

"The country needs inclusive growth and stronger private sector participation to be able to lift the Basotho out of poverty particularly the young, as more than half of the population is below the age of 24," she said. The Basotho are Bantu ethnic group whose ancestors have lived in southern Africa since around the fifth century.

The UN agencies have a key role to play in supporting countries in taking to the SDGs, mainstreaming them into their national plans and policies and implementing them. To support countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN system has come out with a guidance tool called Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPs).

Following the issuance of MAPs, the UN System in Lesotho has drafted the SDGs Roadmap for consultations with national partners.

Sylvia Tiisetso Khabele, UN Volunteer in Communications at United Nations, Office of the Resident Coordinator. "Discussions with the government will also focus on enhancing existing mechanisms to address cross-sectoral issues such as poverty and health.

Additional evidence-based recommendations and a detailed cost breakdown of interventions might be required to support government action plans," she added.

The UN System is looking at developing the data for sustainable development project in partnership with the European Union (EU), Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Development Planning.

This intervention will contribute to realisation of the national, regional and global targets as enshrined in the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) and SDGs by also promoting centrality and availability of quality data, strengthening stakeholder coordination and leadership in collection, dissemination and use of development data.

In line with the NSDP, Khabele reiterated that the UN in Lesotho seeks to help the people and government of Lesotho achieve increased and sustainable agricultural growth, food security, access to energy, and resilience to climate change, while also ensuring sustainable usage of natural resources and protecting the environment.

“Lesotho lagged behind in achieving the MDGs targets of reducing poverty and hunger by half. Given the country’s landscape and socio-economic conditions, agriculture, environment and natural-resources management have a significant role to play in whether Lesotho is now able to achieve the SDGs.

“Unfortunately, the overall performance of these relevant sectors has failed to live up to expectations, fuelling the pervasive poverty and chronic food insecurity, and worsening the health of many Basotho,” Khabele said.

To date, a sizeable number of progressive farmers have established small to medium-sized agribusiness ventures, with the support of different UN agencies. “These businesses are predominately in horticulture (green houses), while there is little focus on small-livestock production (poultry, piggery and other).”

Khabele added: “The UN family continues to build multi-faceted resilience among the most vulnerable segments of Lesotho’s population. In 2014 alone, the UN in Lesotho provided access to fortified food commodities to more than 25,000 beneficiaries through the UN Food-For-Assets Programme. These resilience-building programmes were

accompanied by technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of key institutions for emergency early warning, preparedness and responses to food crises.”

The UN is also working towards integrating social protection with agriculture, through promotion of home gardens and nutrition education amongst recipients of social grants.

Recognizing how important environmental and natural resources management are to improve and sustain the livelihoods of local communities, Khabele said the UN system continues to mobilize and train communities on sustainable land management, conservation-based agricultural production techniques/practices, and how to apply renewable-energy technologies.

Lesotho’s youth unemployment rate, according to ‘The Economic Impact of Youth Unemployment in Lesotho, November 2012’, is estimated at 38.0 per cent in 2010 by the International Labour Organisations (ILO).

Meanwhile, the public relations officer of the Ministry of Development Planning, Mpho Mosili said there is already a roadmap that they are going to follow when implementing the SDGs especially towards eradicating poverty.

She said presentations have already been made before the Parliament and they were well received by the Members of Parliament. “What is left with us now is to go out there to the communities to sensitise them about these SDGs and what do they entail,” she explained.

Lesotho United Nations Development Assistance Plan (LUNDAP) 2013-2017, shows that the Minister of Development Planning

will form part of the UN Country Programme Steering Committee that will be established to guide UN operations in alignment with government priorities.

In this regard, the document shows that the government will invite UN Agencies to its periodic programme reviews and relevant planning meetings, which the UN Agencies are supporting.

Poverty is rife in Lesotho and the rural communities are the ones most hard hit because most of them survive on rain-fed agriculture and do not have any other means of survival.

According to United Nations in Lesotho ‘Delivering As One’ Toolkit, the UN helps address Lesotho’s development challenges by providing evidence-based policy advice and sharing innovation and international best practices.

It further shows that the UN continues to support the government in addressing the development agenda, strengthening national capacities and using its convening role to bring together different stakeholders and facilitated multi-sectoral processes to inform policies and programmes. [IDN-InDepth-News - 03 September 2016]

Photo: Uniformed children in class in Ha Nqabeni primary school, Lesotho | Wikimedia Commons

Costa Rica Setting its Sights on Sustainable Development

By Jose Rafael Quesada

SAN JOSE (IDN) – Costa Rica, a small Central American country with a population of barely 5 million inhabitants, has a high human development index (ranking 69th worldwide) and is considered a consolidated democracy in Latin America.

High investments in education, good development of social security and high levels of openness and competitiveness in international markets make Costa Rica a candidate for membership of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

However, the country is still experiencing serious problems in the area of endemic poverty, a low level of efficiency in the construction of infrastructure, high levels of state indebtedness and high indicators of tax evasion.

As a result, Costa Rica has set itself the target of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, and has made fulfilment and implementation of the SDGs part of government strategy.

Above all, it is promoting a vision of the future based on the Agenda 2030 plan of action for people, planet and prosperity under sustainable development and the Montevideo Consensus on integrating population dynamics into rights-based sustainable development with equality.

The government is including SDGs in institutional planning and budgets, and is proposing guidance for institutions, the private sector, social organisations, the academic and scientific communities, and UN agencies for mobilising resources to implement SDGs.

A number of major sectors for action have been identified: human development and social inclusion; environment, energy, oceans and land use planning; agricultural and rural development; and tourism.

Human development and social inclusion: This includes the reduction of extreme poverty, through social and comprehensive care programmes for households and families headed by women and people with disabilities; reduction of social and territorial inequality through coordinating services, support networks and social and production infrastructural projects; and strengthening the capacities of people living in poverty to enter the labour market, improve their levels

of employability and develop opportunities for entrepreneurship and self-employment.

Environment, energy, oceans and land use planning: The aim is to strengthen the conservation and sustainable use of genetic, natural and cultural heritage from a territorial and marine system based on concerted participation that ensures respect for and the exercise and enjoyment of human rights. Action is being encouraged actions to combat global climate change through citizen participation, technological change, processes of innovation and research, while promoting the efficient use of energy in order to maintain and improve the country's competitiveness.

Agricultural and rural development: Costa Rica's rural agricultural sector has witnessed a decline over the 40 years and now represents only 6 percent of GDP. To meet SDGs in this sector, the government is seeking to increase agricultural value added and give a boost to improvement of productivity and sustainable rural development. It is also to supporting the national goal of poverty reduction through actions to improve the living conditions of rural areas and foster the dignity of the rural population.

Tourism: Current strategy has led to uneven development of this key sector, marked by serious differences in the distribution of income resulting from tourism. The government is now pursuing a strategy for sustainable, supportive and equitable tourism development.

Aware that simple adhesion to the principles of the SDGs alone is insufficient, Costa Rica is also taking steps to produce the necessary changes in the social context of the country for these goals to take effect and have a positive impact on the everyday and long-term situation of Costa Rican people.

Among others, action is being taken to define indicators for monitoring the country's commitment to the SDGs and the Montevideo Consensus, and carry out awareness-raising activities with institutional representatives, NGOs and private companies on the SDGs and national development.

Having approved and published an Executive Order for



implementation of the SDGs, the government is implementing regional and sectoral consultations to define country goals and indicators, as well as establish regional coordination mechanisms for consultations on programmes and objectives.

Finally, emphasis is being placed on raising awareness of and mainstreaming SDGs in the various objectives of the 2015-2018 National Development Plan.

Jose Rafael Quesada is Deputy Mayor, Municipality of Montes de Oca, and President of the Humanist Party, Costa Rica. [IDN-INPS - 30 August 2016]

Photo: *Heliconius doris* Linnaeus butterfly of Costa Rica | Wikimedia Commons

UN Turns to World's Youth for Achieving 2030 Agenda

By J Nastranis



NEW YORK (IDN) - As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's second term comes to an end on December 31, 2016, he has intensified efforts to focus on the concerns and aspirations of world's youth, urging them to lead a global drive to break the patterns of the past and set the world on course to a more sustainable future.

"Young people are directly affected by the tragic contradictions that prevail today: between abject poverty and ostentatious wealth, gnawing hunger and shameful food waste, rich natural resources and polluting industries," Ban said in his message on International Youth Day, celebrated annually on August 12.

The young men and women, who number 1.2 billion, making up the largest generation of youth in history, can deliver solutions on such issues, which lie at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In the first year of that 15-year plan for a healthier, safer and more just future, the International community is counting on the active engagement of young people to transform the production and consumption of goods and services so they meet the basic needs and aspirations of the world's poorest people without overburdening already strained ecosystems, added Ban.

"Young people are traditionally at the cutting edge, and today's youth have more information than any previous generation. Their dynamism, creativity and idealism can combine to shape attitudes toward demand and help create more sustainable industries," continued the UN chief.

He noted that youth are already influencing how the world produces, distributes and consumes while driving green entrepreneurship by designing sustainable products and services.

As conscious consumers, young people are at the forefront of a shift toward more fair, equitable and sustainable buying patterns. Youth are strong and effective advocates of recycling, reusing and limiting waste, and they are leading technological innovations to foster a resource-efficient economy.

“When we invest in youth, they can contribute to new markets, decent jobs, fair trade, sustainable housing, sustainable transport and tourism, and more opportunities that benefit the planet and people,” he said, adding that he was proud that the UN is actively engaged in supporting young leaders who can carry out the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production patterns.

“I encourage all young people to become involved in advancing the SDGs and demanding action by their Governments. My Youth Envoy (Ahmad Alhendawi) is eager to connect you to our campaigns, which are being carried out across the entire United Nations system,” he said.

Ban urged others to join this global push for progress, empowering young people with the resources, backing and space they need to create lasting change in our world.

In her message, Irina Bokova, Director General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said that young people are powerful agents of positive change, essential to taking forward the 2030 Agenda.

Bokova, who is a candidate for the post of the UN Secretary-General, said: “It is not enough to hope for a better tomorrow – we must act now. Change is under way, and millions of citizens are already transforming the way we produce, consume, behave and communicate.”

She pointed out young people such as #YouthofUNESCO sustainable consumption advocate Lauren Singer, point the way towards a zero-waste lifestyle, fitting all of her refuse produced over the past four years into one small jar.

“This is an inspiration for this year’s celebration – ‘The Road to 2030: Eradicating Poverty and Achieving Sustainable Production and Consumption.’ There are countless initiatives like this, all giving shape to a new humanism, to new forms of solidarity and citizenship to combat poverty, marginalization and despair,” she emphasized.

Optimism and confidence do not mean minimizing the challenges ahead. Most young people live today in least developed countries, and shoulder the heaviest burden of conflicts and poverty, stressed Bokova, adding: “There can be no sustainable development if they remain on the side-lines, and I call upon all Member States and UNESCO partners to support their initiatives, to give them voice, to let them grow, to shape together the future of dignity that we are building today.” [IDN-InDepthNews – 12 August 2016]

Photo: Young people from a local NGO in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso | Ollivier Girard.

Thursday's Date with Calls for a Fairer Chile

By Pía Figueroa

SANTIAGO (IDN) – Every year, as they have been doing since 2011, students in Chile take to the streets each Thursday, demanding a free and good quality education system.

They are increasingly being joined by their parents – tired of paying for expensive schooling which is certainly the most expensive in the whole of Latin America – and teachers who leave work to join the students with a call for proper definition of the teaching career.

And virtually every Thursday for the last five years, these demonstrations have been repressed by the police with water cannons and tear gas, ending in unfortunate incidents.

Without being able to establish a proper dialogue in order to satisfy the people, the current government has enacted several laws considered part of a major reform of education, which is one of the “historic” transformations that Chilean President Michelle Bachelet wants to leave as her legacy, along with tax reform, reform of the pension system, electoral reform and civil liberties, such as same-sex partnerships and abortion rights.

Seen from afar, it seems like a major package of meaningful actions. They are legislative proposals that seek to change the foundations of education, economics and Chilean politics, leaving behind the old system in force since the era of Augusto Pinochet. Other initiatives are driving forward social changes, which aim to modernise one of the most conservative countries in the region.

However, perhaps because of the style and form of governing which has lent a deaf ear to the constant demands of the people and cooked up proposals behind closed doors, none of these reforms has left the population with a feeling of agreement, progress or a better future. On the contrary, they have increasingly reduced the level of popular approval of the cabinet and the president, who today has the lowest approval rating a Chilean government has ever had.

Tax reforms proposed by Bachelet – implemented in September 2014 – were primarily aimed at financing changes to the educational system. They sought to increase tax collection by three percent of gross domestic product (GDP) up to 2018, the equivalent of about 8.3 billion

US dollars (of which about five billion would be allocated to education).

However, the economy has since slowed down and momentum has fallen, even if corporate taxes have increased and the tax rate for individuals reduced, and additional taxes on alcohol, sugared drinks and polluting vehicle emissions have been created, as well as mechanisms to combat tax evasion.

This year, 2016, the country will go to the polls in late October to elect new councillors and mayors, measuring the strength of each political party and getting ready for 2017, in which the first post-reform parliamentary elections will be held.

For those elections, the number of members of parliament will increase from 120 to 155, and of senators from 38 senators to 50. It is now also required that at least 40 percent of candidates must be women, pointing to greater gender parity in elected office.

Perhaps these changes could make room for young political groups and extra-parliamentary parties that have not been able to make themselves heard in Parliament, which is still governed by rules and standards designed in the period of dictatorship.

Removing all the shady legal caveats that Chile has kept in place since the ‘dark ages’ has been a battle against cultural conservatism. It was not until 1999 that the law punishing homosexuality was abolished, and only in 2015 were civil unions between couples of the same sex approved.

However the so-called Civil Union Agreement (AUC) leaves Chile behind neighbours Argentina and Uruguay – which passed similar laws some years ago – because, while the AUC allows couples to share assets at the legal level, receive inheritance and pensions and share the benefits of the health system, it does not include the right to adoption.

In terms of civil rights, abortion was only legalised this year, but only for three reasons: risk of life of the mother, rape and fetal infeasibility. This is a step forward considering that Chile had been one of the few countries in the world where abortion was prohibited in all

circumstances and was considered a taboo subject, but it is far from what women's movements are demanding, which is the right to decide over their own bodies.

It could be said that with all these reforms the country is progressing towards the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and maybe so.

In fact, Chile is diversifying its energy matrix towards clean sources (solar, wind, geothermal, small hydroelectric plants, etc.) and also advancing in energy efficiency. Innovation, seawater desalination, efficient use of natural resources, combatting desertification and climate change are all being enhanced in a context of growing environmental awareness. But all this is not enough.

Today, Chileans are obsessed with social changes and want to finish this period with a significant transformation in the educational system, which is understood as the basis from which to aspire to a more egalitarian society.

The call is for a teaching career in line with the demands of teachers and different to that imposed by the Ministry of Education without listening, arbitrarily limiting teachers. Teachers continue to organize their days of national protest against the new teaching career and ring the bells and buzzers of all the country's schools in a sign of massive protest.

Chileans want a country that puts an end to social inequality and the discomfort it generates in all social strata.

It is little known that in late November 2015, the OECD presented its Economic Survey of Chile 2015, including its latest report on income distribution showing that the country led the ranking of the most unequal countries with a Gini coefficient of 0.503 between 2006 and 2011, sharing first spot with Turkey and Mexico. The Gini coefficient is the most commonly used measure of a country's inequality.

The OECD report called for more inclusive economic growth in Chile given that the richest 10 percent currently earn 26.5 times more than the poorest 10 percent, exceeding the average of OECD member countries by more than 100 percent.

These are differences that are intolerable and when people go out to the streets, as they do every Thursday, to protest against the educational system or the pension system, what they are really asking for is an inclusive, fairer country, where everyone has the opportunity to develop and where progress benefits everyone.



Pía Figueroa is the Co-Director of Pressenza International Press Agency, life-long humanist, author of several monographs and books. [IDN-DepthNews - 15 August 2016]

Photo: Streets demonstrations in Santiago for quality education | José Gabriel Feres | Pressenza

Security Council Updated on Conflicts Causing Severe Hunger

By Jaya Ramachandran

BERLIN | ROME (IDN) - The UN Security Council is faced with a critical if not an unprecedented situation: it has been warned that “protracted conflicts affecting 17 countries” have now driven more than 56 million people into either “crisis” or “emergency” levels of food insecurity and are hindering global efforts to eradicate malnutrition.

At the same time, according to a recent report by UNEP and the World Resources Institute (WRI), about one-third of all food produced worldwide, worth around US\$1 trillion, gets lost or wasted in food production and consumption systems.

56 million people trapped in a vicious cycle of violence and hunger amount to about five million more than the population of South Africa and some five million less than that of Italy. Leading the list in terms of the sheer numbers of people whose food security is being negatively impacted by ongoing conflict are Yemen and Syria.

In Yemen, 14 million people – more than half the population – find themselves in a state of hunger crisis or emergency. In Syria, where 8.7 million people – 37 percent of the population before conflict erupted five years ago – need urgent food, nutrition and livelihoods assistance.

A staggering 89 percent of all Syrian refugees currently in Lebanon require urgent food, nutrition and livelihoods assistance, says a new series of 17 country briefs prepared by the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP).

17 countries where conflict has significantly affected food security are: Haiti and Colombia in Latin America and the Caribbean; Burundi, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of the Congo (D R Congo), Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan in Africa; Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen in the Middle East; and Afghanistan in Asia.

In addition, violence associated with the Islamic extremist group, Boko Haram, is adversely affecting Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. The number of displaced people in that region has tripled over the past two years accompanied by rising levels of hunger and malnutrition.

In South Sudan where the situation is rapidly deteriorating 4.8 million people – some 40 percent of the population – are in need of urgent



food, nutrition and livelihoods assistance, the two UN food agencies find.

In countries coming out of extended periods of civil strife such as the Central African Republic and Colombia millions of people are still wrestling with high levels of food insecurity.

While the overall absolute numbers of people facing food insecurity in other countries are lower, adds the joint report, the share of people experiencing severe levels of food insecurity accounts for over half of the total population.

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva and WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin underline in their introduction to the briefs to the Security Council how hunger feeds violence and drives further instability. “Conflict is a leading cause of hunger – each famine in the modern era has been characterized by conflict,” they warn.

And add: “Conflict undermines food security in multiple ways: destroying crops, livestock and agricultural infrastructure, disrupting markets, causing displacement, creating fear and uncertainty over fulfilling future needs, damaging human capital and contributing to the

spread of disease among others. Conflict also creates access problems for governments and humanitarian organizations, which often struggle to reach those in need.”

The importance of the briefs on the food security situation in conflict-affected states which the Security Council will receive regularly from FAO and WFP is highlighted by the fact that the Council “takes the lead in determining the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression”.

The two UN agencies also pointed out that according to recent estimates, approximately half of the global poor live in states characterized by conflict and violence. In such places, the people can be up to three times more likely to be undernourished than those living in more stable areas.

“Addressing hunger can be a meaningful contribution to peacebuilding,” emphasized the FAO and WFP heads, adding, “The 2030 Agenda [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development] recognizes peace as a vital threshold condition for development, as well as a development outcome in its own right.”

The Security Council can indeed handle “crisis” or “emergency” levels of food insecurity by involving the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), “an intergovernmental advisory body that supports peace efforts in countries emerging from conflict, and is a key addition to the capacity of the international Community in the broad peace agenda”.

The Peacebuilding Commission plays a unique role in (1) bringing together all of the relevant actors, including international donors, the international financial institutions, national governments, troop contributing countries; (2) marshalling resources and (3) advising on and proposing integrated strategies for peacebuilding and recovery and where appropriate, highlighting any gaps that threaten to undermine peace.

Countries on the PBC agenda are: Burundi, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia; and the Central African Republic.

The United Nations has also been spending billions on assisting in navigating the difficult path from conflict to peace in different parts of the world. The UN General Assembly on June 17, 2016 approved USD 7.86 billion for 15 peacekeeping missions in the coming twelve months.

The approved budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016 amounts to about USD 8.27 billion – less than half of one per cent of world military expenditures (estimated at \$1,747 billion in 2013).

The top 10 providers of assessed contributions to UN Peacekeeping operations in 2013-2015 are; United States (28.38%); Japan (10.83%); France (7.22%); Germany (7.14%); United Kingdom (6.68%); China (6.64%); Italy (4.45%); Russian Federation (3.15%); Canada (2.98%); and Spain (2.97%).

UN peacekeeping operations in the fiscal year July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2017 will target Sudan’s Abyei region, the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Cyprus, Darfur, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Golan, Haiti, Kosovo, Liberia, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Western Sahara and Somalia. A number of these countries are threatened by acute food insecurity. [IDN-InDepthNews – 31 July 2016]

Photo: At least 7 million people across Yemen are living under emergency levels of food insecurity. A further 7.1 million people are in a state of crisis, according to the latest assessment | Asmaa Waguih | WFP

Reforestation in Oxapampa: Peru's Challenges and Priorities

By *Fernando Torres Morán*

LIMA (IDN) – Oxapampa is a province in the Pasco Region, in the high jungle area of Peru, which is home to the Oxapampa-Asháninka-Yanesha Biosphere Reserve that was recognised by UNESCO in 2010.

The reserve houses a number of protected natural areas such as the Yanachaga Chemillen National Park, with an area of 122 thousand hectares (spread over the districts of Huancabamba, Oxapampa, Villa Rica and Pozuzo) and the San Matías-San Carlos Protection Forest, with an area of 145,818 hectares (spread over the districts of Palcazu, Puerto Bermudez and Villa Rica).

Over the decades, the area has suffered forest depredation, and Peru's non-governmental Pronaturaleza foundation for the conservation of nature has recently condemned the illegal felling of trees in the Yanachaga Chemillen National Park, including the extraction of one hundred thousand planks of wood from trees such as thyme, cedar and fig.

Due to poverty in the area, members of the indigenous population engage in the extraction process attracted by the offer of small sums of money from unscrupulous loggers in return for permission to fell trees in the zones that they have been allocated.

The history of deforestation in the area, which is rich in biodiversity, dates back to the middle of the last century when timber started to be extracted for export to other countries. The first working timber yards were set up some 60 years ago.

With the passage of time, lumberjacks began encroaching on out-of-bounds sectors, giving rise to unrestricted and unsupervised tree-felling under successive governments. The Oxapampa Mountains, previously full of forest life, turned into areas of less vegetation.

This was aggravated by growing farming activity in which hectares of land were turned over to the production of fruit or were used for grazing purposes to feed cattle. The result was a rise in the phenomenon of migratory activity in which land, once exhausted, was abandoned and new land was sought for farming, with no attempt to rehabilitate the exhausted land.

According to Ivo Bozovich, General Manager of Maderera Bozovich, one of the oldest lumber businesses in the Oxapampa area, agriculture and livestock are the activities that generate 87 percent of deforestation, "because they lead to the felling and burning of trees". When this happens, after three years the land is no good, adds Bozovich.

Even if it is true, as some environmentalists note, that a number of timber yards are developing their activities sustainably, felling only mature trees and leaving younger trees in place (a kind of pruning), there are also those who indiscriminately exploit areas, leaving large swathes of previously tree-covered land empty.

Today, the situation appears to be changing for the good. Peru, as a member of the

United Nations and committed to its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has implemented a National Forest Conservation Programme for the Mitigation of Climate Change, which includes a satellite monitoring system and specific rules for intervention and prosecution of illegal tree felling under a Ministry of Environment Plan.

The programme includes a planning strategy that envisions 11 axes for prevention, control and prosecution of deforestation and illegal logging. Moreover, today there is a National Strategy for Forests and Climate Change, the objective of which is "to reduce deforestation and degradation of our forests and thereby reduce emissions of greenhouse gases" and which has engaged the participation of both the public and the private sector.

One example is the work of Pronaturaleza which is working with 14 communities in different zones, including Oxapampa, and in which sustainable land management is being established.

Similar efforts are necessary to achieve SDG 15 (Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss).

One of the objectives that the government has set is to achieve reforestation of at least two million hectares by the year 2030 and communities themselves can contribute to this objective through small actions.



Such is the case of the Ana Mogas Education Institute in the town of Quillazu, Oxapampa, which has shown that sustainable development and profit can go hand in hand. A decade ago, the institute had 3300 eucalyptus trees on three hectares. Eight years later, it was able to sell the wood, allowing it to purchase 15 computers for educational purposes.

With the planting of the trees made possible through donations and contributions from the parents of students, this is a clear example of a reforestation and sustainable development project which can also benefit a group of people who became aware of the possibilities that controlled tree-felling and commerce brings.

Nevertheless, more government efforts are needed. In the Yanachaga Chemillen National Park. For example, there are only 20 forest rangers due to a lack of funds, a number which is insufficient for covering the park. In the Oxapampa Forestry and Fauna Technical Administration Office, there are only two officers who are dedicated to administrative work, making it impossible for them to inspect the park.

The Peruvian government clearly needs to invest more in this area, one of the biggest parks in Peru. The Yanachaga Chemillen National Park contains archaeological remains from the Inca and Yanasha cultures. It also contains a global record in flora with 2584 species and the fauna that inhabits the park numbers 59 kinds of mammals, 427 types of birds, 16 of reptiles and 31 of fish.

The native communities that have lived there for centuries have the natural means to live a dignified life. All that is necessary is to dedicate more energy and resources, giving them the tools and the knowledge so that they themselves, and not just the big businesses (and definitely not the illegal loggers), are those that see the benefits from controlled exploitation of the area's resources.

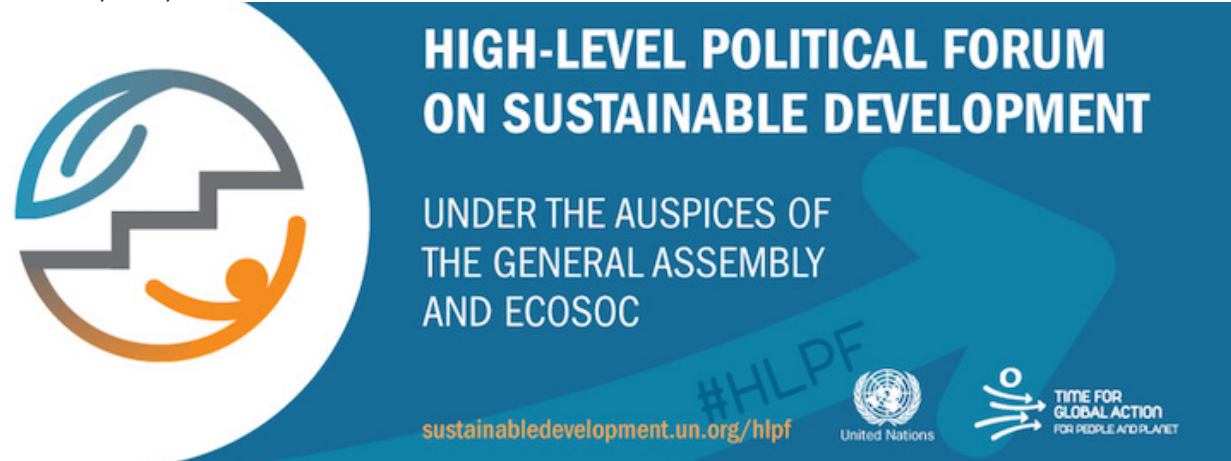
The Peruvian government has taken important steps in the direction of developing a long-term plan for conservation and reforestation of the country's vast forest lands. Nevertheless, a bigger budget and more attention to resolving the specific problems of each area are necessary.

[IDN-InDepthNews - 20 July 2016]

Photo: BOSQUES

Youth Empowerment Crucial in Achieving SDGs

By Rodney Reynolds



UNITED NATIONS (IDN) – The United Nations formally launched on July 11 its global campaign to help ensure the implementation of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at achieving social, economic and environmental advancement for over 7.0 billion people worldwide.

But the lingering question before the 10-day High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on SDGs was whether or not the international community will reach its targets, including the elimination of poverty and economic inequalities by 2030, as envisaged by world leaders in September 2015?

Reiterating the primary theme of the SDG Forum – “Ensuring that no one is left behind” – UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the successful implementation of SDGs will depend on its inclusiveness.

Besides the United Nations, he called for the active participation of governments, business communities, youth, women, indigenous peoples, the academic community, civil society

and philanthropic organizations, in helping realize the Goals. “We must put people and the planet at the centre of what we do – underpinned by human rights,” he said, even as he singled out the role of youth who will stand the test of time as the SDGs reach their targeted date reaching out to the year 2030.

The world today is home to the largest generation of youth in its history, with 90% of young people living in developing countries and with estimates suggesting that labour markets will need to add 600 million new jobs by 2026 to accommodate changing global demographics, according to the United Nations.

Ban said: “Empowering young people through skills development strengthens their capacity to help address the many challenges facing society, including poverty, injustice and violent conflict”.

There is no better investment, he declared, than helping young persons to develop their abilities. Successful skills programmes link

young people with opportunities to gain experience and jobs. The fact that the implementation of SDGs will be a long term process underlines the special significance of young people.

Speaking on Youth Skills Day on July 15, Sri Lanka’s Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Rohan Perera said: “We are focused on the implementation of the 2030 agenda, bringing aspects of youth skills development, and reducing youth unemployment into the national sustainable development frameworks.”

In Sri Lanka, he said: “We make all endeavours to include youth and their skills-building with a view to ensuring that ‘no one is left behind’ in our quest for sustainable development.” As a result, Sri Lanka has initiated a process themed ‘Planning for an Inclusive Transformation’, which is the foundation for evolving the ‘National Sustainable Development Roadmap’.

Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson told the Forum July 18: “We have 15 years to end extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition, preventable deaths of newborns and children under five, as well as to end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases.”

“We have 15 years to achieve universal health care coverage and free primary and secondary education, as well as to end discrimination against women and girls.”

“And we have 15 years to transition to a

low-carbon economy and change unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.” The road, however, is a long way ahead.

At a civil society event, sponsored by Japan and South Korea, several representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) pondered the crucial role of governments in implementing SDGs.

Both Japan and Korea are expected to enhance cooperation between their governments and civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly on SDG 16 (on governance) and SDG 17 (on partnerships).

The participating NGOs at the civil society event included the Korea NGO Council for Overseas Development Cooperation, the Global Call to Action Against Poverty, the Japan Youth Platform for Sustainability, Soka Gakkai International (SGI), and Save the Children Japan.

Sujung Nam of the Korea Policy Center emphasized the role of Korean CSOs in helping implement SDGs. She pointed out that Korean CSOs are focused on three issues: social development, economic development and environmental development.

The question remains as to how the respective governments can help, specifically with increased Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Highlighting the role of youth, Tadashi Nagai of SGI presented the results of a straw poll on “SDGs and Youth in Japan and South Korea”. According to the survey, conducted among 350 students in June-July, half of the young respondents “don’t know” about SDGs: 41 percent in Japan and 57 percent in Korea.

But the percentage of youth who were aware (“very well”) of SDGs was only 8.0 percent in Korea and 29 percent in Japan. And more than half of the respondents – 57 percent in Japan and 85 percent in Korea – did not recognize the differences between SDGs and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which ended in 2015.

Asked what policies and actions are needed for “leaving no one behind”, the responses included: empathy with others; dialogue with minorities; education; attracting attention from civil society; ownership; think globally, act locally; and global citizenship.

Meanwhile, according to the UN Foundation, the current socio-economic problems, facing mostly the developing world, are reflected in a rash of “staggering statistics”: one in 8 people still live in extreme poverty; nearly 800 million people suffer from hunger; an estimated 5.9 million children die before they reach age 5; more than one in four girls marry before their 18th birthday; 1.1 billion people live without electricity; and over 2.0 billion people suffer from water scarcity.

“We have to hit the ground running,” said Ambassador Oh Joon of South Korea, currently President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), urging member states to track their progress in periodic “national reviews” over the next 14 years.

The title of the meeting, High Level Political Forum, he noted, should be changed to something more appropriate: ‘SDG Review Conference’.

For starters, he pointed out, 22 countries, both from the developed and developing world, have voluntarily submitted their national reviews of SDGs before the Forum last week.

According to the UN’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), mobilizing efforts by the 22 countries include South Korea’s gender-oriented project titled ‘The Better for Girls Initiative’, which focuses on girls’ education and health.

Norway has adopted a Norwegian Action Plan for Biodiversity in 2016 and Uganda has initiated a number of social programmes such as the Youth Livelihood Programme, Community Tree Planting Project and the Women Entrepreneurship Programme

The 22 countries, which highlighted their efforts to integrate the Goals with their sustainable development plans, include: China, Colombia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Madagascar, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Norway, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Switzerland, Togo, Turkey, Uganda and Venezuela. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/inputs> [IDN-InDepthNews – 19 July 2016]

Photo: UN

UN Internal Oversight Criticises Gender Imbalance – and More

By Ramesh Jaura

BERLIN | NEW YORK (IDN) - The Department of Political Affairs plays a central role in the United Nations efforts to prevent and resolve deadly conflicts around the world. But it will not be on the radar screen of the Security Council when it opens on July 21 the first round of unofficial ‘straw polls’ to agree on one of the 12 candidates for the post of the Secretary-General.

A candidate who is acceptable to the five permanent members – USA, Russia, China, Britain and France – and is elected later by the General Assembly to succeed Ban Ki-moon, whose second five-year term expires on December 31, 2016, will however have to pay heed to the Evaluation of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs (DPA).

The reason: DPA’s latest evaluation by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) published on May 31, 2016 is studded not only with praise for the accomplishments of the Department. It also carries a few brickbats.

The Internal Oversight notes with satisfaction that since the 2006-2008 evaluation, DPA has evolved from a largely desk-based department into a more field-focused operation, reorienting its activities to support field-based conflict prevention and resolution (CPR) work.

CPR work is undertaken mainly through Special Political Missions (SPMs), which have increased in number since 2008, as well as through United Nations Country Teams in non-mission settings.

From Headquarters, DPA supports these various entities through liaison with Member States, other United Nations entities, and others to broadly foster an enabling environment for the field to succeed.

At field level, DPA support ranges from general assistance (for example, policy guidance, administrative assistance) to specialized expertise (such as electoral assistance, mediation), aimed at strengthening the field’s capacity to achieve its CPR mandates.

The latest evaluation assessed the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of DPA substantive support to field-based CPR from 2008-2015. It relied on a wide a range of qualitative and quantitative sources to support its analysis.

During the period evaluated, DPA supported almost all of the highest-criticality conflict settings. The establishment of DPA regional offices, along with the deployment of Peace and Development Advisers to non-mission settings, has helped broaden its global reach, according to the OIOS evaluation.

“Beyond the highest-criticality settings, however, the Department’s presence is less far-reaching,” notes the Internal Oversight. It admits that resource constraints have limited its capacity to meet all needs. But adds that “strategic planning documents do not demonstrate clear, data-driven thinking on how DPA will focus its limited resources on other settings in need”.

DPA staff, the field-based entities they support, and OIOS direct observations underline that the Department’s shift away from desk-based analysis has left a gap – namely, early-warning analysis that could help DPA better foresee and act on potential threats to peace.

These gaps notwithstanding, adds the Internal Oversight, there is evidence that DPA support has been effective and that it has contributed positively to field success. Staff from entities in numerous field settings point to such examples.

“At the same time, they note areas of lesser effectiveness, namely the Department’s inability to address system-wide administrative challenges, coordination and intervention with other actors on behalf of the field, and long-term strategic guidance to the field,” says the OIOS Evaluation.

While the DPA’s attention to gender and human rights has progressed, “both Headquarters and field leadership remain gender-imbalanced, and neither gender nor human rights is universally a field priority”, criticises the Internal Oversight.

At the same time, while DPA has responded to the support needs of a growing number of field operations, its human and financial resources have not kept pace with demand.

“Wider United Nations administrative procedures have also hampered its efficiency. In addition, the Department is weakly positioned to monitor overall mission



accountability for results, missions' adherence to United Nations principles, and eventual exit. A lack of attention to harnessing knowledge on performance has further prevented the Department from enhancing accountability – and from learning from its successes and shortcomings,” states the Evaluation.

OIOS makes four important recommendations, all of which DPA has accepted. It asks the UN Department of Political Affairs to: institutionalize its role in strengthening field-level accountability, in consultation with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.

DPA is also asked to fill key analytical gaps, i.e., in overall contextual analysis for early warning and early action, and in evaluation; strengthen Headquarters and field-level planning processes; and undertake measures to adequately resource core functional gaps.

In addition to its more than 250 professional and administrative staff at UN headquarters in New York, DPA draws from the work of political and peace-building missions under its supervision, which employ more than 1,700 national and international staff in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

The Department works closely with Member States to establish UN regional offices capable of providing support and advice, as required, in conflict prevention and resolution. [IDN-InDepthNews – 15 July 2016]

Photo: United Nations Headquarters in New York City, view from Roosevelt Island | Neptuul | Wikimedia Commons

UN Agenda 2030: Civil Society Holds Governments Accountable

By J Nastranis

NEW YORK (IDN) - As the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development started its first review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) July 11-20, civil society coalitions from around the world brought to New York their own findings, calling on member states to take note of these.

Because the Forum is the UN's central platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda adopted by world leaders on September 25, 2015. It is slated to adopt a Ministerial Declaration to provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations on the 2030 Agenda's implementation and follow-up; keep track of progress of the SDGs; spur coherent policies informed by evidence, science and country experiences; as well as address new and emerging issues.

Independent monitoring and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its structural obstacles and challenges are, therefore, key factors for the success of the SDGs. It is for this reason, the Reflection Group on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development together with other civil society organizations and networks has produced the first annual Spotlight Report assessing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the structural obstacles in its realization.

"The report puts a spotlight on the fulfilment of the 17 goals, with a particular focus on inequalities, responsibility of the rich and

powerful, means of implementation and systemic issues," says Social Watch.

Among the questions it poses are: What are currently the main obstacles to achieving the SDGs? Are there transnational spill over effects that influence or even undermine the implementation of the goals? Are the current policy approaches, as they are reflected, inter alia, in the 2030 Agenda, an adequate response to the challenges and obstacles (or are they part of the problem)? What has to be done? Which specific policy changes (at international level) are necessary?

The findings of several of the national reports have been published in the Spotlight Report released July 12 today at the United Nations "We should not be talking any more about domestic or home affairs on the one hand and foreign affairs on the other," commented Juerg Staudenmann from Alliance Sud, the coalition of Swiss development NGOs. "They are now one and the same. All action needs to be assessed with regard to its impact in the world, not just on one specific country only."

The civil society report for Switzerland highlights, precisely, the negative impact on developing countries of the secrecy of the Swiss banking system, which encourages damaging tax evasion, corruption and illicit financial flows.

Shadow reporting is a well-established tool of civil society when it comes to holding governments accountable. Since implementation of the 2030 Agenda is just

starting, the main focus in the alternative reports presented is to devise and discuss methodologies and indicators, to monitor governments' efforts on drafting national strategies and to identify obstacles that can impede progress towards the SDGs.

"There are obstacles for the accomplishment of various SDGs and their targets in the Mexican framework for the energy sector," explained Areli Sandoval, from Equipo Pueblo. The Mexican constitution has been reformed "to prioritize hydrocarbons over any other use of the lands concerned".

Sandoval expressed concerns "about the lack of human rights and sustainability approach in some aspects of the current Mexican legislation, policies and programmes". She mentioned examples regarding policies on food, housing, sexual and reproductive health, security and drugs.

Sandoval's demand for "meaningful civil society participation in the design of the national implementation plan and the SDGs national indicators and follow up mechanism" echoes what many other civil society coalitions want to happen in their countries.

In Egypt the new development strategy was not discussed by parliament or through public participation, informs Mahinour El Badrawi, from the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights. She explains that although the Government presents itself as "a leading country in the 2030 development process, and participates in the National Voluntary Review

Process, its plan lacks measurable indicators for success, a road map for reaching its goals, or even consistency between rhetoric and implementation.

For example, although the 2014 constitution sets a minimum spending level on Health and Education, the 2016-2017 public budget does not meet that minimum, nor is it recognized as a goal in the Government's 2030 Vision. The plan also relies heavily on public private partnerships without attempting any reform that reverses the decades of crony capitalism and corrupt institutional practices that have resulted in economic crisis, impoverishment, and public unrest since 2011.

Fiscal issues were also raised by the report from Social Watch Philippines, asserting that "tax injustice is imbedded in the system and as a result unregulated corporate activities harm people and the



environment". Marivic Raquiza explains that "while more than 26.3 percent or about 27 million Filipinos live in poverty, the benefits from growth are concentrated in the hands of few billionaire families, the less than 1 percent who dominate the political economy".

Wolfgang Obenland introduced the German civil society report, a result of the joint efforts of the national coalitions of environmental and development NGOs. "According to the 2030 Agenda, no country can consider itself having achieved sustainable development," he explained.

"We need to move away from the notion that Germany is a trendsetter regarding sustainability. In large areas, this country is not a pioneer, but is severely lagging behind. The world does not expect Germany to be a pioneer, but it expects that we finally acknowledge the urgent need for action that exists with respect to our agricultural, trade, and transport policies and in many other areas. And that we draw meaningful consequences from this."

Obenland found it ironic that, as a result of the accounting of support to refugees as part of official development assistance (ODA), "in 2015 the number one recipient of German ODA was... Germany".

Roberto Bissio, from Social Watch, summarized the contributions of many NGO coalitions that could not come to New York to present their findings personally. He cited the Peruvian report as illustrative of the dilemmas in many countries:

"Peru has experienced sustained economic growth, due largely to rising prices of gold, copper and other minerals, but virtually the entire territory has been given in concession to mining, oil, and logging companies, frequently in conflict with local populations.

"Income poverty has decreased, but multidimensional poverty has worsened. Progress has been made in circulation of money and electronic and telephone connectivity, but increased levels of crime are taking over streets and cities and corruption resulting from the influence of corporate power reaches every part of the government."

Thus, in the words of Peruvian writer, artist and social scientist Héctor Béjar, "the road to achieving the 2030 goals is hazy and full of obstacles". [IDN-InDepthNews - 13 July 2016]

Photo: Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon discusses Climate Change (SDG 13) with Students at the UN headquarters in New York on 21 June 2016

UN Fighting to Fend Off 'The Little Boy' and 'The Little Girl'

By Jutta Wolf

BERLIN | ROME (IDN) - Three Rome-based UN agencies are keen to avert further havoc wreaked by the twins with euphemistic names - 'The Little Boy' and 'The Little Girl' - and are calling for governments and the international community to ramp up efforts to safeguard livelihoods of some 100 million people around the world.

"The new pattern of climate events (better known by their Spanish designations, El Niño and La Niña) is exposing weaknesses in our preparedness, in international and government systems and in community infrastructure," says the newly-appointed United Nations Special Envoy on El Niño & Climate Ambassador Macharia Kamau.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon appointed Ambassador Kamau (Kenya's Permanent Representative to the UN in New York) and Mary Robinson (former President of Ireland, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and founder of the Mary Robinson Foundation - Climate Justice) as his Special Envoys on El Niño and Climate in late May 2016.

They are tasked with calling attention to the more than 60 million people around the world affected by severe El Niño-linked drought and climate impacts, and mobilising an integrated response that takes preparedness for future climatic events into account. About 40 million in East and Southern Africa alone, are expected to be food insecure due to the impact of the El Niño climate event.

As part of their new roles, the Special Envoys have been travelling to meet with El Niño-affected communities around the world to understand their challenges and priorities: Ambassador Kamau travelled to Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste in the Asia-Pacific region, and Mary Robinson travelled to Ethiopia.

"Both rapid and slow-onset climatic events are exposing years of poor investment and preparedness, demanding a much better financed and integrated response," Ambassador Kamau warned at an event jointly organised at the Rome headquarters of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on July 6, 2016. The meeting included the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

Ambassador Kamau added: "These climatic events are also exposing the vulnerability of our grand plans for fighting poverty and sustaining our infrastructure. The SDGs are under threat and we should recognise this moving forward."

SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals - are the new global development agenda with a 2030 deadline comprising 17 goals and 169 targets endorsed by world leaders in September 2015.

The three agency chiefs also urged greater preparedness to deal with the possible occurrence later this year of a La Niña climate event, closely related to the El Niño cycle that

has had a severe impact on agriculture and food security. The Horn of Africa, Southern Africa, Central America's Dry Corridor, Caribbean islands, Southeast Asia and Pacific islands have been hit the hardest.

According to the UN, scientists are predicting an increasing likelihood of the opposite climate phenomenon, La Niña, developing. This will increase the probability of above average rainfall and flooding in areas affected by El Niño-related drought, whilst at the same time making it more likely that drought will occur in areas that have been flooded due to El Niño.

The UN estimates that without the necessary action, the number of people affected by the combined impacts of the El Niño/La Niña could top 100 million.

Participants in Rome meeting included: Minister in the Prime Minister's Office of Lesotho, Kimetso Henry Mathaba; Minister for Livestock, Forestry and Range of Somalia, Said Hussein Iid; and Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare of Zimbabwe, Priscah Mupfumira. Keynote speakers included World Meteorological Organization Secretary-General, Petteri Taalas, and UN Special Envoy Ambassador Macharia Kamau.

They noted that almost \$4 billion is required to meet the humanitarian demands of El Niño-affected countries and that almost 80 percent of this is for food security and agricultural needs.



Mobilise new resources

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva warned that the impact of El Niño on agricultural livelihoods has been enormous and with La Niña on the doorsteps the situation could worsen.

“El Niño has caused primarily a food and agricultural crisis”, Graziano da Silva said. He announced that FAO will therefore mobilize additional new funding to “enable it to focus on anticipatory early action in particular, for agriculture, food and nutrition, to mitigate the impacts of anticipated events and to strengthen emergency response capabilities through targeted preparedness investments”.

Mobilizing resources for rapid action now

can save lives and minimize damage while reducing costs in the future, noted WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin. “The massive impact of this global El Niño event, exacerbated by persistent poverty and chronic hunger in many countries, threatens the food security of millions of people who are the least able to cope,” she said.

“Farms have failed, opportunities for work have evaporated, and nutritious food has become increasingly inaccessible for many communities,” Cousin added. “But new humanitarian crises are not inevitable if we invest in support for communities and provide the tools and skills required to endure climate-related shocks.”

IFAD Associate Vice President, Lakshmi Menon, reminded the global community not to forget about small-scale farmers, who are the most vulnerable to these extreme weather events.

“Small-scale farmers in rural areas are disproportionately impacted by these natural disasters because many of them depend on rainfed agriculture for their lives and livelihoods, and they do not have the capacity to bounce back from shocks. We need to invest in building their long-term resilience so when the next El Niño and La Niña cycles hit, they are better prepared and can continue to grow food for their families,” she said.

UN Special Envoy Kamau noted that the humanitarian community in partnership with governments and regional authorities have developed a number of plans in order to respond to the current El Niño event, and that these plans are multi-sectoral and require longer-term, predictable funding in order to ensure they are fully implemented.

Drought has gripped large swathes of east and southern Africa and has also hit Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam, while El Niño-associated storms have wiped out harvests in Fiji and some of its neighbouring island states.

Participants noted that in southern Africa a three-month “window of opportunity” exists before the 2016/17 planting season begins and that adequate interventions, including agricultural input distributions are urgently needed to avoid the dependence of millions of rural families on humanitarian assistance

programmes well into 2018.

In Southeast Asia, drought and saltwater intrusion are threatening the livelihoods of farmers in Viet Nam and also seriously impacting household food security and cash availability. With the monsoon season fast approaching, most farmers need to purchase inputs for their upcoming agricultural and animal production activities. While in the Pacific region the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau have already declared a state of emergency and below-normal rainfall is forecast to continue across the northern and western Pacific areas threatening the livelihoods and well-being of 1.9 million people.

FAO, IFAD, WFP working together

The meeting underlined how the three Rome-based agencies are working to fend off the devastating impact of the climatic events.

FAO, for example, is supporting more than 50 000 households in Southern Africa, including in Zimbabwe with livestock survival feed and drought-tolerant sorghum and cowpea seeds, and in Malawi, by vaccinating small livestock and providing drought-resistant cereals and irrigation support. In Lesotho and Mozambique, FAO has been strengthening national response and providing coordination support.

Throughout the Horn of Africa, in partnership with governments NGOs and other UN agencies, FAO is also coordinating drought-related interventions, providing agricultural inputs, helping to rehabilitate water structures and animal health and production, and plant and animal disease surveillance and control.

In the Asia Pacific region, FAO's El Niño response includes a detailed assessment of the situation in Viet Nam where it is also on standby to provide emergency seeds and tools. In Fiji, FAO is currently providing emergency assistance to 1 050 households as part of the Cyclone Winston response. FAO is working with partners in Papua New Guinea to support farming families in the worst affected provinces with drought-tolerant seeds and smart irrigation material (e.g. drip-irrigation systems). In Timor-Leste, additional maize and cover crop seeds are being distributed to farmers affected by El Niño.

Building climate resilience to drought and other extreme weather events is a priority in IFAD-supported projects and this is helping vulnerable families cope with the impacts of El Niño. For example, in Ethiopia small-scale irrigation schemes have ensured farmers are less dependent on rainfed agriculture. This is coupled with training in more sustainable water usage, water harvesting techniques and rehabilitation of degraded soils. In the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam, IFAD-supported projects are helping farmers to access saline-tolerant rice varieties and to diversify their incomes into small-scale aquaculture, so they are not solely dependent on rice and can continue to earn incomes during the drought.

World Food Programme has rapidly scaled-up relief operations to assist communities grappling with El Niño's impacts, providing emergency food where needed or cash to buy food where markets are functioning. In Ethiopia, more than 7.6 million people have received food assistance from WFP and more than 200 000 people have also received cash transfers.

In Swaziland, WFP has launched emergency food distributions and in Lesotho, has begun cash-based transfers. In Malawi, WFP will scale up its new lean-season food assistance programme to reach more than 5 million people by November. In Papua New Guinea, over 260 000 people affected by El Niño-related food insecurity are receiving WFP food assistance.

Resilience-building is integrated into emergency responses when possible. In Zimbabwe, a grains production pilot supported by weather-based financing facility FoodSECuRE trains smallholder farmers in climate-smart agriculture and the use of drought-tolerant grains.

The Rural Resilience risk management Initiative (R4) has provided El Niño-related payments to affected farming families in Ethiopia, Malawi and Senegal. WFP also works closely with African Risk Capacity (ARC), an insurance pool to lower the cost of the response to disasters before these become humanitarian crises." [IDN-InDepthNews - 6 July 2016]

Photo: Dugda Woreda, East Showa zone, Oromia region, Ethiopia, an area severely affected by the drought | Charlotte Cans | OCHA

Zimbabwe Battling to Promote Sustainable Economic Growth

By Jeffrey Moyo

HARARE (IDN) – Clad in faded trousers and shirt and an old pair of shoes dotted with a mixture of patches and holes, 38-year-old Jemituso Simango trudges along First Street in the Zimbabwean capital with a huge sack containing empty plastic bottles hanging on his back as he rummages through dustbins in search of valuables.

Simango holds a Marketing Diploma from Zimbabwe's Harare Polytechnic College and at first glance many take him for a lunatic, although he is an ordinary man at 'work' trying to earn a living against the backdrop of this Southern African country's faltering economy. After failing to secure employment, many like Simango have turned to doing various substandard jobs to sustain themselves.

Without decent employment, Simango has endured deepening poverty as Zimbabwe has continued to pursue economic policies inimical to job creation in contrast with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 8 of promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all.

With Zimbabwe's unemployment rate hovering around 90 percent, sustainable economic growth may be a mountainous task for this country, amid rampant company closures pushing millions of people out of formal employment.

Zimbabwe's 2013 National Social Security Authority (NSSA) Employer Closures and Registrations Report for the period July 2011 to July 2013 showed that 711 companies in the country's capital, Harare, had shut down, leaving over 8,000 individuals jobless.

For many economically bruised Zimbabweans like Simango, decent employment has become a thing of the past. "Instead of seeing our country making headways in creating decent jobs for all, everything here seems to be working against the UN goal of promoting sustainable economic growth," he told IDN.

Even with the hyped strategy to revive the country's economy – the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset) – it seems there is no respite in the battle to promote sustainable economic growth.

The ZimAsset initiative was crafted by this country's governing



Zimbabwe Africa National Union-Patriotic Front party in 2013 to achieve sustainable development through use of the country's abundant human and natural resources but, with no activity taking place around the initiative, it has not yet shown itself capable of promoting sustainable economic growth. "ZimAsset lacks funding and it also has no buy-in from international financial institutions," Tapiwa Mashakada, Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change shadow Minister of Finance, told IDN.

The result is that many like Simango have been forced to hatch desperate plans for survival in the country's comatose economy. "Apart from collecting empty plastic containers for recycling, I also do all sorts of menial jobs to earn a living while my wife is a vendor in the capital, where our school-going children join her daily after school," Simango told IDN.

However, Zimbabwe is not the only country in this part of the world facing woes when it comes to promoting sustainable economic growth. In South Africa, for example, unemployment hovers around 27 percent of the country's population of about 52 million people, according to

Statistics South Africa, while Zambia is also battling to contain joblessness which stands at around 14 percent of the country's estimated population of 15 million people. In fact, the entire Southern African region stands at a critical point as far as the UN's sustainable development goal (SDG) of economic growth is concerned. Some of the highest unemployment rates on the African continent are in Southern Africa, where 51 percent of young women and 43 percent of young men are unemployed.

In May this year, Zimbabwe's Finance and Economic Development Minister Patrick Chinamasa told journalists that the government was developing a two-year poverty reduction strategy which "will focus on practical well-targeted measures that can be implemented in the short to medium term, with long lasting impacts that guarantee improvement in the welfare of the citizenry."

Agriculture was singled out as key to dealing with the poverty challenges that the country face which had been exacerbated by an El Nino-induced drought in the previous season. But even before then, poverty had already shot up thanks to the country's chaotic land seizures from white commercial farmers 16 years ago, leaving the land in the hands of poorly-equipped indigenous farmers.

With huge tracts of land rendered less productive following the country's land redistribution exercise, Dr Jesimen Chipika, national coordinator of the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP), attributed the deepening poverty levels here to the underperforming agricultural sector.

"Poverty levels keep rising across the country, with most families experiencing food deficits owing to underperforming agriculture," Chipika told IDN. Nevertheless, while poverty rages among the country's peasants where, according to the country's Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, approximately seven million of rural dwellers live in abject poverty, economic development minister Chinamasa points to agriculture as a springboard of economic breakthrough.

"Transforming agriculture will have a positive impact on the rest of the economy, and certainly that is where livelihoods are made, as 75 percent of the population depends on agriculture," Chinamasa told IDN.

Zimbabwe has a population of approximately 13 million people, with 67 percent of these living in the rural areas.

Poverty in Zimbabwe has been long blamed on corruption in government circles and civil society activists here say that Zimbabwe's bid to achieve the UN's sustainable economic growth goal rests on the country's determination to tackle corruption at top government levels.

"Poor corporate governance repels public trust while it can also be destructive to the country's economy at a time the country is in dire need of international capital," Owen Dliwayo, programme officer of the Youth Dialogue Action Network, a youth lobby group here, told IDN.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe's underperforming economy is also to be blamed on President Robert Mugabe's tenacity with controversial economic policies, according to independent economists here.

These, they say, have resulted in this country lagging behind in terms of achieving the UN SDG of promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.

"Despite seeing how destructive the indigenisation policy that his [Mugabe's] government keeps chasing, he has kept calling for the seizure of foreign owned firms by local black Zimbabweans, scaring away any potential investors," Kingston Nyakurukwa, an independent economist here, told IDN.

According to Zimbabwe's Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act, 51 percent of foreign businesses should be ceded to indigenous persons, a move many like Simango feel would keep them jobless a bit longer.

"Indigenisation has helped to keep foreign investors away from Zimbabwe, meaning continued unemployment for us," said Simango. (IDN-In-DepthNews - 1 July 2016)

Photo: With Zimbabwe's economy falling apart, the country faces an arduous task to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all, with many jobless Zimbabweans taking to street pavements as vendors | Jeffrey Moyo | INPS-IDN.

World's 'Big Six' Advertisers Support UN's 2030 Agenda

By Jaya Ramachandran



BERLIN | CANNES | NEW YORK (IDN) – Nearly six months before Ban Ki-moon relinquishes his post after ten years as UN Secretary-General, his unrelenting efforts underway since January to engage corporate leaders and entrepreneurs for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are beginning to bear fruit.

Speaking at the Lions Festival of Creativity, Cannes, on June 24, Ban said the world's six biggest advertising and marketing services groups – Dentsu, Havas, IPG, Omnicom, Publicis and WPP – had decided to launch a first-of-its-kind initiative, the Common Ground initiative.

The initiative seeks “to beat ultra-competitors, poverty, inequality and injustice” by supporting a 15-year anti-poverty, pro-planet action plan, adopted by 193 Member States in September 2015.

The 2030 Agenda requires a serious partnership for humanity, and there is perhaps no brand with a more important purpose in the world than the SDG ‘ring,’ Ban said.

“The Olympic rings stand for the highest standard in sports. The SDG

ring stands for the highest standards in social commitment, human well-being and global solidarity,” Ban added.

“The six biggest communications businesses in the world have risen to what some may have said was an impossible test: they have agreed to put their differences aside in support of a joint unique and exciting initiative to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs,” Ban said.

“In the short term, we want the 2030 Agenda to be known by 2 billion people. We want to mobilize one million people as change agents. Help us reach far and wide,” the UN chief told the International Festival of Creativity – a gathering of professionals working in the fields of advertising, marketing and innovative communications.

“This is Cannes – so I have come with a pitch,” Ban said. “I know all of you have tremendous power to shape opinions. You are master storytellers. And I want you to help us create the biggest campaign ever for humanity.”

The 2030 Agenda, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is the biggest anti-poverty, pro-planet action plan ever adopted by the United Nations, and it is for everyone, everywhere, he explained. “If I had to give it a tagline, it's this: ‘We are the first generation that can end global poverty. We are the last generation that can address climate change before it is too late,’” he said, stressing that none of the SDGs can be achieved by anyone alone.

Ban asked the participants to help make sure the SDGs are the business of all businesses – and the business of all people, inspire all, especially young people and women, and find the best ways to tell the story. “Your ingenuity, innovation and powers of persuasion are second to none. Help us transform a complex and abstract agenda into a personal and emotional story about how we can build a better world,” he said.

“The timing is right for this type of innovation. . . We are in the first year of implementing a 15-year plan. Getting it on track at the beginning is critical to achieving our goals at the end. The communications industry is famous for its creativity and energy. The United Nations fully supports

channelling this dynamism towards answering the greatest challenges facing our planet and humanity,” the UN Chief said.

The new collaboration, Common Ground, takes off immediately, with two immediate objectives: to come together to help to address the Sustainable Development Goals and to encourage other industries to follow suit and find their own common ground.

Kick-starting the Common Ground programme will be a global advertising campaign, with space donated by key business and thought-leadership publications.

In addition, the six companies have agreed to provide a development fund for each of the winning ideas in the Cannes Young Lions competition, which this year was devoted solely to the SDGs. These funds, a first for the Young Lions Contest, will be used to develop the winning concepts and provide them the strongest possible chance of being put into practice.

In a joint statement, Tadashi Ishii, Chief Executive Officer and President of Dentsu; Yannick Bolloré, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Havas; Michael Roth, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of IPG; John Wren, President and Chief Executive Officer of Omnicom; Maurice Lévy, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Publicis Groupe; and Sir Martin Sorrell, founder and Chief Executive Officer of WPP, said: “The Common Ground initiative recognises that the global issues the UN has identified transcend commercial rivalry.”

By working in partnership to support the SDGs, the Six want to demonstrate that even fierce competitors can set aside their differences in order to serve a wider common interest. “We hope others in and beyond our own business decide to do the same.”

Two days ahead of the announcement of the Common Ground initiative, Ban rallied corporate leaders gathered for a summit in New York to focus on key areas required to reach a new era of sustainability, including responsible practices, transformative partnerships, breakthrough innovation and targeted investment.

In his remarks to the 2016 UN Global Compact Leaders Summit, Ban stressed that achieving the aims of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development would require finding new ways of living that would end the suffering, discrimination and lack of opportunity for billions of people around the world.

As such, he called on all stakeholders – from world leaders and chief executives, to educators and philanthropists, and across all sectors and industries – to work together in broader and deeper partnerships.

The UN Global Compact, the world’s largest corporate sustainability initiative, supports companies to do business responsibly by aligning their strategies and operations with Ten Principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption; and to take strategic actions to advance broader societal goals, such as the SDGs, with an emphasis on collaboration and innovation.

The Leaders Summit on June 22-23 aimed to jump-start business action everywhere on the Goals. To that end, the Global Compact unveiled a multi-year strategy to drive business awareness and activity that supports the achievement of the Goals by 2030.

Key elements of the new ‘Making Global Goals Local Business’ strategy include an annual Leaders Summit, the SDG Pioneers programme, Local Network SDG Action Plans, UN-business partnerships, and impact reporting.

Recalling the adoption last year of both the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on climate change, Ban in his remarks said sustainable development could not be separated from fighting the impacts of climate change, and called for a holistic development model that will take climate impact and fragile ecosystems into account, and would benefit both people and the planet.

Noting that trillions of dollars will be invested in infrastructure in the coming years, he said that the Paris Agreement and the SDGs give the private sector an unprecedented opportunity to create clean-energy, climate-resilient, sustainable economies.

“We are at a decisive moment in the shift to sustainable and inclusive markets,” continued the Secretary-General, noting that the first step in this regard would be to mobilize the global business community as never before. “All businesses, everywhere, can and should play a role in improving our world. That starts with integrity – doing business right,” he said. . [IDN-InDepthNews – 24 June 2016]

Photo: UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon meets with winners of the Cannes Young Lions competition in France | Eskinder Debebe | UN Photo

Zimbabwe Makes Headway in Achieving Gender Equality

By Jeffrey Moyo

HARARE (IDN) - Despite the hurdles women continue to face in Zimbabwe, this country has made significant headway in achieving gender equality in line with Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be attained by 2030.

There is improved women parliamentary representation and increased numbers of girls in university than their male counterparts now - and this as more women have also taken up once male-dominated jobs.

According to UN Women, the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, women's representation in Zimbabwe's Parliament more than doubled from 17 per cent following the 2008 general elections, to 35 per cent in the elections on July 31, 2013.

Zimbabwe has joined the ranks of the more than 30 countries the world over that have used a special electoral quota system to increase women's representation in Parliament to at least 30 per cent, based on assessments by the UN Women.

As a result, there are now 124 female parliamentarians out of the 350 legislators in Zimbabwe's new Parliament which also includes 86 women in the National Assembly, with 60 in the reserved seats and 26 directly elected to the 210 constituency seats.

In the country's army too, women have of late been elevated to top positions, not the least because of the support by UN Women Zimbabwe country office, which has been assisting government by focusing on the development, empowerment, political participation and safety of women here.

"Zimbabwe has prioritised 10 SDGs including SDG5. Most of the prioritised goals are gender inclusive," Jelda Nhliziyo, Strategic Advisor Specialist of the UN Women in Zimbabwe, told IDN.

Zimbabwe is a signatory to the ratified international and regional instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Southern Africa Development Community Gender and Development Protocol (SADC Gender Protocol), among others.

The Southern African nation in 2013 also adopted a new Constitution that is characterised by strong gender equality and women's rights provisions, according to the country's Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender, Gender and Community Development.

"Our government has demonstrated its commitment to the advancement of gender equality and women's rights through a strong legal and policy framework, and we can safely say we are moving in the right direction in promoting gender equity here," Nyasha Chikwinya, Zimbabwe's Minister of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, told IDN.

Two years ago, in a milestone for the United Nations in Zimbabwe, the UN Women, ILO, UNDP, and UNFPA launched the country's first joint programme to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Initiated with the support of the Government of Sweden, the programme is being implemented in collaboration with Zimbabwe's Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development - this as the Southern African nation is party to international and regional instruments for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

As headway towards attaining gender equality, Zimbabwe presently holds about 25 percent representation in public service institutions, with remarkable improvements seen in the Zimbabwe Defence Forces, where women now occupy important positions.

Consequently, for women in the army like Ellen Chiweshe, whose title was group captain and was recently promoted to become the country's first female air commodore, which is the number three post in the air force of this country, the sky is the limit.

"The sky is the limit. There is nothing that can stop women from attaining high posts," Air Marshal Perence Shiri, the commander of the Air Force of Zimbabwe, told the state-run Herald newspaper earlier this year.

UN Women Zimbabwe is working closely with the government and civil society to ensure commitments made by the government in

Harare are supported and advanced through policy reforms, identification of resource shortfalls that impede women's development and inclusion.

UN Women here is also on record supporting civil society to empower women politicians and government officials to identify and respond to the needs of Zimbabwe's downtrodden women in order to enable them access education.

This, according to UN Women, has ensured Zimbabwean women develop at par with their male counterparts, at a time when the African Union is also prioritising the SDGs at both national and regional levels, with gender equality as a cross cutting goal.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has also been up for the match to ensure gender equality is fulfilled in Africa as a whole and Zimbabwe in particular.

"SDG Goal 5 on gender equality goes much further than its predecessor MDG 3, with a much stronger emphasis on voice, choice and control," noted the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance in its note to the SADC Gender Ministers meeting held in Harare in May.

But a top women rights activist here, Catherine Mukwapati, director of the Youth Dialogue Action Network, a democracy lobby group, feels gender equity as per the UNSDG5 continues to be under threat in the country's remote areas.

"Poverty among rural households remains a hurdle amidst economic migration affecting women and children here, with the women continuing to face political, social and economic inequalities, which have also been aggravated by the gender-specific results of HIV and AIDS," Mukwapati told IDN.

"Indigenous cultures and traditions still held in high esteem in the countryside have also continued to render all matters related to gender equity an anathema and therefore unrecognised as rural women remain downtrodden in many aspects of life," added Mukwapati.

Nonetheless, two years ago, the United Nations in Zimbabwe launched the country's first Joint Programme on Gender Equality, which saw the Swedish International Development Agency contributing over US \$5 million intended to accelerate advancement towards women's empowerment.

Within the same period, Zimbabwe also became a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Southern Africa Development Community Gender and Development Protocol (SADC Gender Protocol).

Mildred Chauke - an 18-year old girl now doing her Advanced Level of Education in Harare, the Zimbabwean capital - says she is a living testimony to the government's strides to achieve the UN gender equality goal after she received government support to pursue Science education as a female student.

The Advanced Level of Education popularly known as 'A' Level in Zimbabwe, is the highest secondary level of education prior to university or college entry.

According to latest figures, released by the country's Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development, as of March 11, 2016, the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics initiative had benefitted 3,404 students across the country's 10 provinces, with 55 percent of these being females. [IDN-InDepthNews - 5 June 2016]



Photo: The girl child has become the major beneficiary of the UN SDG5 as Zimbabwe fights to attain the goal | Jeffrey Moyo | INPS-IDN

Conference Adopts Global Education Action Agenda to Implement SDGs

By Ramesh Jaura and Katsuhiko Asagiri

GYEONGJU, South Korea (IDN) - Five months after the international community began implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) endorsed by world leaders in September 2015, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academia have finalized and adopted a global education action agenda.

The agenda affirming the importance of Sustainable Development Goal 4 - ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong opportunities for all - is spelt out in the Gyeongju Action Plan.

It was agreed at the 66th United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) / NGO Conference that concluded on June 1, 2016 after three days of deliberations in Gyeongju, a city on South Korea's southeast coast.

The conference was underpinned by three pillars: Formal Education; Informal Education and Training; and Advocacy and Public Information, which were examined as a means to eliminate inequalities that create barriers to learning.

Commenting the outcome, Cristina Gallach, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information said: "This conference has demonstrated another example of the value for the United Nations in investing in partnership with academia and NGOs."

The Gyeongju Action Plan provides concrete guidance for NGOs around the world to enhance their ability to lobby governments to commitment to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and mobilize NGOs in communities on the ground.

"The United Nations is committed to continue to support and partner with NGOs and academia in our joint efforts to advocate for and successfully implement the 2030 Agenda," Gallach added.

The Gyeongju Action Plan includes a series of concrete measures as a reference for NGOs around the world to jump start implementation of the 2030 Agenda, at the grass roots level.

Dr. Scott Carlin, Co-Chair of the conference and Associate Professor of Geography at Long Island University in the U.S. said: "NGOs from around the world brought passion and expertise to lively final consultations on the outcome document. We are grateful for all of the inputs received and very proud of the Gyeongju Action Plan."

Dr. YuKang Choi, Co-Chair of the conference and NGO Representative to the United Nations for Dream Touch for All, said: "We hope that Gyeongju was an inspirational setting for finalizing a truly unifying action plan that will be useful for NGOs, wherever they are working."

For the first time in the history of the DPI/NGO Conference, youth also developed and issued a Youth Declaration.

Gallach, UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, pointed out that youth had "come in great numbers, demonstrating the value that they see in partnering with the United Nations".

"It's truly inspiring to find so many people, especially young people, coming together from all over the world under the theme of education for global citizenship and in a shared commitment to achieving the SDGs," said Hirotsugu Terasaki, Director General, Peace and Global Issues, Soka



Gakkai International (SGI), based in Tokyo.

Pointing out that “so many discussions and dialogues, so many interactions and so much networking” had taken place during the conference, he said: “I believe that this in itself is a highly effective form of education for global citizenship.”

Ahmad Alhendawi, the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, noted “the conference not only reinforced the critical role of NGOs to achieve a vision for the 2030 Agenda, but also stressed the urgency for greater investments in education for global citizenship to unlock the potential of this massive generation of children and youth.”

“Unfortunately youth are still not involved enough in policy making processes around the world,” said Saphira Rameshfar, Representative of the Ba’hai Community to the United Nations and youth leader at the conference.

“The Youth Declaration is a necessary reminder that young people are needed as leaders and decision-makers not only in youth forums and special-purpose councils, but in those spaces where the course and direction of society as a whole are determined,” added Rameshfar.

Emphasizing the need for an adequate follow-up, Terasaki said: “The conference has ended, but the real work has just begun. As we go back to our respective homes and communities, we need to expand our different networks, sharing what we have learned and what has inspired us.”

He added: “We need to keep deepening our understanding of global citizenship and the role of all learning in promoting it. Most of all, we need to encourage global citizenship in our daily lives, starting with ourselves.”

There was broad agreement among the participants from around the world that the contribution of NGOs, academia and youth will be key to achieving the SDGs, for without the participation of NGOs and civil society groups, no initiative, however visionary, can be fully achieved.

“I am such a strong believer in NGOs, I constantly call on governments to expand space for you to operate,” said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his opening address on May 30.

Four days earlier, at the Jeju Forum for Peace and Prosperity, Ban had denounced “shrinking democratic space” and urged freedom for

civil society organizations and human rights defenders. “Unfortunately, that freedom is under threat, including at the last place this should happen: at the United Nations. I call on Member States to stop constricting NGO engagement,” Ban said.

South Korean Prime Minister Kyo-ahn Hwang reaffirmed the country’s commitment to fostering global citizenship. “We worked very hard so that global citizenship was reflected in the SDGs,” he said, adding: “Global citizens need to fulfil the basic values of humanity. They need to be proactively involved in solving global issues. This conference, under the theme of ‘Education for Global Citizenship: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Together’ will encourage people to become involved.”

But what exactly does ‘global citizenship’ mean? Independent educationists appear to agree that it embodies three essential elements:

The wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living; the courage not to fear or deny difference; but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures, and to grow from encounters with them; and the compassion to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one’s immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places.

These three elements are an integral part of the Gyeongju Action Plan. [IDN-InDepthNews - 2 June 2016]

Photo: Participants applauding adoption of the Global Education Action Plan by the UN Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organization Conference, Gyeongju | Katsuhiko Asagiri | INPS Japan

Humanitarian Summit in Perspective: Disaster Prevention is Feasible

By Jacques N. Couvas

ISTANBUL (IDN) - The gaping absence of a large number of world leaders, including those of most of the Group of 7 (G7) industrial nations, undoubtedly caused profound disappointment. But the first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in the 70-year existence of the United Nations will not go down in history as a shameful debacle for international diplomacy, nor will it be the last conference of its kind, according to experts.

While G7 leaders were conspicuous by their absence, with the exception of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, some 9,000 participants from 173 countries joined the event in Istanbul. They included some 60 heads of state and government, mostly from the developing world.

All major media, business corporations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also attended the dense schedule of daily plenary assemblies, 15 special sessions, and 132 committee meetings and side events, which aimed at involving all stakeholders interested in resolving humanitarian crises and their underlying causes: conflict, lack of economic and environmental sustainability, and exclusion.

Particularly noticeable was the active participation of interfaith groups, composed of representatives of the mainstream religions, but also including newer, but highly active in humanitarian work, religious movements.

Though UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon proposed the Summit as far back as 2012, it acquired added significance because of the recent massive outflow of migrants from the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA), and the way it was handled by the 28-nation European Union.

The disregard for basic rules of protection of civilians by belligerents from all sides in the zones of combat – a novel aspect in international armed conflict – provided additional justification for several high level meetings. International humanitarian law, and the law of War, were often used by delegates as points of reference.

The central effort of the WHS was, however, focused on finding solutions for the alleviation of suffering of 130 million people around the world, whose existence is threatened by human-made as well as

natural disasters. There was particular emphasis on preventing, rather than responding to such outcomes.

In fact, two of the truly tangible items for action of the Summit were disaster prevention and cost-reduction in humanitarian activities.

On the first day of the Summit on May 23, the head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Robert Glasser, warned that risk reduction efforts would struggle to have impact if greenhouse gas emissions are not radically scaled down.

Focusing on prevention of, rather than response to disaster is in the interest of the member states, said Glasser, as it is a much more effective approach, both in terms of the number of victims and financial consequences. He expressed his optimism about the genuine collaboration towards this goal from a large majority of countries on all continents.

“I am convinced that all our efforts to reduce disaster risk will be overwhelmed if we do not make serious progress on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The consequences will be deadly, including impact on disease outbreaks, storm surges, and drought, which can contribute to conflict,” explained Glasser.

UNISDR’s plan contemplates full cooperation by member states in three action areas:

- (a) establishing disaster loss databases, which can guide investments in resilient infrastructure;
- (b) using data from the past, but systematically anticipating future risk. “Given underlying drivers of risk such as climate change, population growth and urbanization, the world needs realistic projections of disaster losses in the future,” emphasized Glasser; and
- (c) planning of infrastructure by governments that should factor-in such past experience and decide rationally.

“That means things like not building a hospital in a flood zone”, said Glasser. “Disaster risk reduction must become a key part of economic planning,” he concluded.

The timeframe for achieving all this is 2030, a date consistent with the



agency's Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 , adopted at the Third UN World Conference in March 2015 in Japan.

But what are the probabilities that such an ambitious and complex plan can produce results by that deadline?

"One hundred percent!", Robert Glasser told INPS-IDN. "We are shooting for total preventability over time. The question is how well UN's member states will participate in, and implement the decisions made at the environmental conference in Paris [COP 21]", he added.

But the overall success still depends on many factors and the willingness of stakeholders to commit to such effort. Pursuing this goal requires the enhancement of the implementation capacity and capability of developing countries, in particular the least developed ones, small island developing states, landlocked developing countries, and African nations as well as many middle income states, whose national priorities widely vary, delegates familiar with the details of the Sendai Framework told INPS-IDN

Costs associated with humanitarian activities are of great concern to all UN member states. It was, therefore, with relief that delegates received the announcement of the agreement concluded among 30 representatives of donors and aid agencies on a package of reforms to humanitarian funding, launched at the WHS.

The initiative aims at making emergency aid more efficient and economically effective. Its target is to reduce operational costs by one billion U.S. dollars annually in the next five years. This amount represents less than ten per cent of the total spent in humanitarian aid.

Labelled "The Grand Bargaining", the package has been presented as a series of commitments among the more powerful donors and aid agencies to improve management methodologies for handling the vast amounts raised around the globe for humanitarian aid.

Measures include greater transparency and compliance with international standards in budgeting, on-going communication and cooperation among the signatories, and the implementation of a common process for data-inputting and of reporting forms and procedures.

Changing current practices in budgeting and allocating the funds to activities through subcontracted agencies is "much more complicated than many people think", according to Lilianne Ploumen, the Dutch development minister, who was part of the high level team that shaped the deal.

Experts from the field were, in private conversations on the margin of the Summit, sceptical as to the feasibility of such a plan, considering the difficulty of the parties in coming to a consensus during the negotiations for the Grand Bargaining.

There is a propensity by aid agencies to give cash to populations in distress, a practice to which U.S. organizations are strongly opposed. Accountability for the use of funds is also a concern for most large donors.

So, what after this Summit? "This is not a one-off event, Robert Glasser, UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction told INPS-IDN. "This is just the beginning", he maintained. [IDN-InDepthNews - 27 May 2016]

Photo: High-Level Leaders' Roundtable on "Managing Risks and Crises Differently". Source: WHS

The Forgotten Humanitarian Crisis in the Balkans

By Vesna Peric Zimonjic

BELGRADE (IDN) - The violent split up of former Yugoslavia is more than two decades old. Peace was established in the region back in the 1990s. Yet for those who hardly know about the brutal violence and humanitarian disaster that accompanied the political breakup, little would appear to have changed.

"There is no more arms rattling, but the political rhetoric and lack of profound economic recovery keep people stuck in recent past, with poor view on better future," prominent sociology professor Ratko Bozovic says. "There are new generations all over the former Yugoslavia who know nothing else but how this or that war was fought."

The professor explained that no real insight into causes, accompanied by little perspective, creates a fertile ground for further confusion among the young who should take their nations into the future.

"Many political structures created during the wars, and surviving until today, remain the key obstacle to processing the effects of wars," said Daliborka Uljarevic, head of an eminent non-governmental organisation Centre for Citizens' Education (CCE) at a recent round table on post-conflict Balkans societies. The title of the event was "How politicians see the process of reconciliation in the region."

The path to reconciliation is still very sluggish. Wars in former Yugoslavia began when two of its republics, Slovenia and Croatia, declared independence in 1991, with Bosnia-Herzegovina following in 1992. The

moves were opposed by Belgrade, capital of Serbia and the six-member federation. War in the ethnically homogenous Slovenia lasted only 10 days with few victims and quick agreement between Ljubljana and Belgrade, which withdrew its forces from Slovenia.

However, under the pretext of protecting the interests of Serbs, who comprised significant parts of population in Croatia and particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Belgrade regime of Slobodan Milosevic engaged both the federal army and paramilitary units from Serbia to fiercely fight the independence moves. Croatia and Bosnia responded with creations of their own armed forces that bitterly fought what was called "the Serb aggression".

In the 1991-95 war, more than 120,000 people were killed, most of them non-Serbs, meaning Bosniak Muslims and Croats. The number of displaced in Bosnia-Herzegovina, at the peak of the war, reached almost two million out of the 4,3 million population. People moved to the areas where their ethnicity prevailed within the country, Serbs to Serbian held and Muslims and Croats to Muslim and Croat held.

As for the economy, the Croatian State Auditing Commission has put the war damages at 36 billion dollars, with destruction of 180,000 homes and 25 percent of economy. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the University of Sarajevo professor Duljko Hasic has recently put the damages to 15,6 billion dollars for the 44 months of the capital's siege by the

Yugoslav and Bosnian Serb armies.

None of the economies in the region have reached the gross domestic product level of 1989, the pre-war year established by regional economists as the basis for comparison.

"Sustainable development is still years away from the region," Belgrade economy professor Miodrag Zec says. "It is not only because of wars, but also because of the disintegration of common production in former Yugoslavia, disintegration of its common market and lagging behind the economic changes that occurred in the 90s," he added. "Whatever was achieved in post-war period fell behind with the global economic crisis since 2008," Zec explained.

Thousands of people are still missing and war crimes are still being processed before the United Nations founded International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

One of the most gruesome was the massacre of more than 7,000 Muslim men and boys, by Bosnian Serbs, in Srebrenica, a tiny Muslim enclave in eastern Bosnia, in July 1995. Some 5,000 victims have been dug up from shallow graves since and identified by DNA analyses. Mass graves are still being discovered in the mountainous areas surrounding Srebrenica.

The massacre came only months before the Dayton Peace Accords, sponsored by the United States and the international community, brought peace to Bosnia-Herzegovina, turning it into two-entity state. One is run by Bosnian



Serbs, the other jointly by Bosnian Muslims and Croats.

It remains firmly divided along those ethnic lines, with Bosnian Serbs not even recognising Sarajevo as their capital, having one of their own in Banja Luka. The dysfunctional state is unable to provide even the joint results of census, which was carried out in 2013.

“People formally say it is one state, but live completely separate lives,” analyst Pero Simic says.

This is largely due to the almost non-existent returns, as people remain in the areas where their ethnicity prevailed. Swapping of homes between ethnicities was a routine in post-1995 period. Dozens of thousands who could not return simply migrated to third countries.

The return was almost impossible for Croatian Serbs as well. Their war-time alliance with Belgrade and rebellion against capital of Zagreb since 1991 led to sweeping operation “Storm” by Croatian army in August 1995, when almost 200,000 fled to Serbia proper. The Krajina region where they lived became a deserted area.

Croatian generals who led the operation, that saw 1,800 Serbs dead or missing, were acquitted of war crimes before the ICTY.

Thousands of Serbs have returned to Krajina, mostly the elderly, but most have found new lives in Serbia or abroad.

“There is no political will for the solution of problems that evicted Serbs face,” said Miroslav Linta, top Serbian official for issues of Serbs living outside of Serbia proper. “There are issues with 40,000 homes and more 50,000 people who can not get their pensions,” he added.

Yet justice for victims and rectifying of mistakes from the past seem to be largely forgotten by top politicians in the three countries, despite the fact that war-time leaders Slobodan Milosevic, Croatian Franjo Tudjman and Bosnian Muslim Alija Izetbegovic are dead now.

“Politicians don’t see their interest in the adequate dealing with issues related to recent past, as they don’t asses it as the subject that provides them with popular scores in public”, Uljarevic said.

“They should abandon the framework of daily political tactics and create context that will provide justice for victims, truth about war crimes and just sentences for perpetrators and those who ordered the crimes. This is the precondition for societies in the Balkans to build themselves in accordance to the values of civil societies, rights and freedoms for each and every individual,” she added.

Only two republics of former Yugoslavia left the ex-federation peacefully. Macedonia declared independence in September 1991 and Montenegro in 2006. What used to be Serbian province of Kosovo went down the road of independence since 1999, proclaimed it in 2008, closing the chapter of a history of joint state that was created in 1918. [IDN-InDepthNews – 26 May 2016]

Photo: View of Grbavica, a neighbourhood of Sarajevo, approximately 4 months after the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord that officially ended the war in Bosnia | Public Domain (PD-USGov-Military)



Photo: UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (left) with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (right) | WHS

Humanitarian Summit in Perspective: Falling Short of Lofty Expectations

By Rodney Reynolds

ISTANBUL (IDN) - The first-ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, which Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon proposed as far back as 2012, failed to meet its lofty expectations despite four years of consultations with 23,000 people in over 150 countries.

"This is a 21st century United Nations gathering," Ban boasted to delegates in his opening remarks. But the two-day summit, which concluded May 24, did not generate any significant funding nor did it receive the whole-hearted political support of the UN's Big Five - the UK, U.S., France, China and Russia - whose leaders were conspicuous by their absence.

Besides UK, U.S. and France, even the remaining G-7 leaders were missing in action: heads of government from Canada, Italy and Japan shied away from the summit. Only German Chancellor Angela Merkel was in Istanbul to represent the world's seven industrialized democracies.

A visibly-disappointed Secretary-General was forced to sound optimistic even under the most trying circumstances: "But the absence of the leaders of the five permanent Security Council members from the World Humanitarian Summit does not provide an excuse for inaction," he said.

He expressed "disappointment" that only the German head of government represented the G-7, whose leaders are meeting in Japan May 26-27, with the UN Secretary-General as a guest of the Japanese government.

The Istanbul summit was also touted as "an important first step" towards an upcoming high-level meeting of world leaders, September 19 in New York, to address the refugee crisis.

Still, 173 countries participated in the humanitarian summit which was attended by 60 world leaders, mostly from the developing world.

The summit's biggest single achievement was to focus on one of the world's most pressing problems: the rising humanitarian emergencies, triggered both by growing military conflicts and increased natural disasters, which have displaced nearly 130 million people worldwide reducing them either to the status of refugees or internally displaced

persons (IDPs).

According to the UN, the most severe humanitarian crises are in the Middle East and Africa, including in Iraq, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Speaking at the Doha Forum in the Qatari capital, just two days ahead of the summit, Ban said vulnerable people across the world are rightly asking: "Where is the humanity?"

"Our funding appeal remains woefully underfunded. And where is the solidarity?," he asked.

Turkey was probably the most appropriate venue for the humanitarian summit since it has played a significant role in alleviating the ongoing crisis. Of the five million Syrians who have fled the country since the civil war began in 2011, over 2.7 million are now in Turkey, making it the country hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees in the world today.

Across the border, in northern Syria, nearly four million people rely on cross-border aid delivery. However, less than a quarter of the funding needed this year to help Syrians and the communities hosting them has been contributed.

Sara Pantuliano, Managing Director at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), said: "The commitments made at the Summit have fallen short in substance and ambition and there is little clarity about how pledges that have been made will be taken forward and turned into reality."

She said there have been exciting initiatives launched on the fringes, but it has been a missed opportunity to tackle the major problems at the heart of the formal humanitarian system.

"With all the talk about putting people at the centre of humanitarian action, there has been little to suggest the main players will put aside their institutional interests for those of people struggling to survive in crises," Pantuliano added.

Meanwhile, ActionAid, one of the active human rights organizations battling the humanitarian crisis, said it was "dismayed" by the poor representation of women's voices at the summit. "It's truly disheartening

to see an agenda so clearly dominated by men,” said Michelle Higelin, Co-Chair of ActionAid’s International Humanitarian Platform.

If the international humanitarian system could hold a mirror to itself, she said, it would clearly see a need for radical change and the urgent need to shift its male-dominated power base. “Ignoring gender equality in the limited space made available at the Istanbul Summit does little to build confidence that this is more than a talk fest and that the Agenda for Humanity just words on paper.”

This despite the fact that the UN Secretary-General insisted that it was “crucial to bring more voices to the table.”

“Women have a vital role to play, not just as recipients of protection but as agents of peace,” she said, ahead of the summit.

According to the UN, there were at least two positive outcomes of the summit.

The so-called Vulnerable 20 or V20 Group of Finance Ministers launched a new global partnership with UN agencies, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Bank.

The partnership aims to strengthen preparedness capacity in the 20 countries so that they can attain the minimum level of readiness by 2020, for future risks, mainly caused mostly by climate change.

The UN also joined hands with the business community to launch a major global network to facilitate business engagement in crisis situations, including through the pre-positioning of supplies as well as providing resources, knowledge and expertise to disaster prevention.

According to the UN, the summit reaffirmed the five core responsibilities of the Agenda for Humanity: political leadership to prevent and end conflict; uphold norms that safeguard humanity; leave No One Behind; change people’s lives, from delivering aid to ending need; and invest in humanity.

Perhaps the last word came from Pierre Bertrand, a former director of the New York Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, who said: “At the end, though, everyone should coalesce around the premise so frequently invoked at the UN Security Council by managers of humanitarian operations: There are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian crises, only political ones.” [IDN-InDepthNews – 25 May 2016]



Indigenous Peoples Insist on Equality of All Rights

By Rizwy Raheem

NEW YORK (IDN) – The world’s indigenous peoples – estimated at over 370 million living across 90 countries and accounting for 15 percent of the poorest – remain isolated, both politically and geographically.

So, nearly a thousand participants from Asia, Africa, North America, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean gathered together to air their grievances before the United Nations at a two-week long conference, which concluded May 20.

Their plea for inclusiveness was a reiteration of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s appeal to the international community on the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for a more humane and prosperous world for all – “leaving no one behind”.

The conference ended with a resounding call for greater participation in the United Nations and in UN bodies by some of the world’s most neglected minorities who are increasingly victims of armed conflicts, corporate greed and rising economic inequalities.

Since the establishment of a UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2000, and despite a UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the General Assembly in 2007, indigenous groups have expressed great concern over the growing number of military conflicts affecting them worldwide.

The most affected are indigenous people caught in crossfires in current and past armed conflicts in Colombia, India, Myanmar, the

Philippines, Bangladesh, Guatemala and Peru, according to Victoria Tauli-Corpuz of the Philippines, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The grave consequences include forced displacement, extra-judicial executions, sexual violence and forced recruitment of child soldiers.

“The violations against indigenous peoples in the context of armed conflicts cause trauma and irreparable harm, destroy their culture and rip apart the social fabric of the affected indigenous communities,” she declared.

Not surprisingly, the theme of the conference was: “Indigenous Peoples: Conflict, Peace and Resolution.”

According to the United Nations, extractive industries, including mining oil palm plantations and the construction of dams, often take place without the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples.

During violent conflicts, indigenous peoples are often among the most vulnerable due to situations of poverty, political marginalization and systemic discrimination that many still face.

At the conclusion of the meeting UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon admitted that while much has been achieved to improve the rights of indigenous peoples, conflicts on their lands and territories, and the lack of inclusion of their voices in peace processes, remain a challenge.

He called on all Member States and the

entire UN system to work together to address these and other serious concerns.

Stressing that indigenous peoples are firmly on the UN agenda, and were fully engaged in negotiations for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change, “it is now crucial that they also participate in and contribute to implementation and follow-up”.

Ban urged indigenous peoples to remain engaged and actively participate in the process initiated by the President of the General Assembly to enable their representation in meetings of relevant UN bodies.

Briefing reporters May 19, Alvaro Esteban Pop of Guatemala, Chair of the Forum, said that among the most significant topics discussed during the session were peace and conflict resolution; the issue of children and women in situations of violence; and the persecution of leaders involved in conflicts over land and natural resources.

“These are fundamental aspects of any negotiation and any region in the pursuit of resolutions and peace therein,” he stressed.

Pop said while dialogue had not been easy over the last two weeks, it was absolutely necessary to be able to continue working together.

“Every day we learn more,” he added. He said many indigenous speakers had described the serious situation of their respective people, in particular their struggle to access land and



resources, the violence and abuse suffered by indigenous women and girls, and their lack of access to health and education.

Indigenous women had made their “voices of protest heard”, he noted. Also, the high rate of suicide among indigenous youth, which related to colonial injustices of the past, was simply unacceptable, he declared.

“While it was essential to ensure broad partnership among indigenous peoples, Governments and the United Nations, the Organization could serve as an indispensable bridge of communication between Member States and indigenous peoples,” he added.

Joan Carling, a Forum member from the Philippines, said 2017 will mark the 10-year anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

“It will be a critical year in terms of reviewing what has been achieved,” she said, adding that discussions at next year’s Forum will revolve around how further implementation of the Declaration can be achieved.

She stressed the importance of UN Funds and Programmes to support legislative action for the Declaration’s inclusion in national laws and policies.

Carling also said discussions at this year’s Forum had made it “very clear” that many indigenous peoples are not aware of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which therefore indicates a need for outreach and awareness-raising on the issue.

Another crucial element involves incorporating specific targets and indicators relating to indigenous peoples into the SDGs, although in this sense she noted the lack of data disaggregation as a factor impeding the measurement of progress towards meeting any specific targets.

The conference ended with several key recommendations to the UN’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), including the preservation of indigenous languages.

In the absence of such a measure, the Forum warned that more than half of the world’s indigenous languages would become extinct by 2100 and recommended that Member States recognize the language rights of indigenous peoples and develop policies to promote and protect indigenous languages, including by supporting full immersion methods.

It further recommended that States and the United Nations system provide support, including funding, for the efforts of indigenous peoples’ institutions to preserve and revitalize their languages, and that the General Assembly proclaim an International Year of Indigenous Languages by 2020.

Additionally, it called upon Member States to implement the recommendations of the international expert working group meeting on indigenous youth held in 2013, and urged the consideration of a distinct United Nations voluntary fund for indigenous youth, or the earmarking of existing and future funds for that purpose.

It also urged Member States to take all measures necessary for the prevention of self-harm and suicide among indigenous children and young people, recommending that States adopt measures to address the specific problems of police brutality, systemic police violence and discrimination against indigenous women. [IDN-InDepthNews – 22 May 2016]

Photo: A view of participants in the General Assembly Hall during the opening ceremony of the Fifteenth Session of the United Nations

Bangladesh Taking Action to Mitigate Potentially 'Catastrophic' Climate Change

By Naimul Haq

BHOLA (IDN) - Bangladesh is one of the world's countries worst affected by the global warming impact of climate change caused by greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions - extreme weather events such tropical cyclones, severe floods, rainstorms and river erosion, extreme heat waves and unexpected droughts on vast stretches of land are on the rise.

The country's coastal regions face a rising sea level, higher tides and saline water intrusion which is already encroaching further inland and destroying agricultural opportunities. The effect of greenhouse gas emissions along Bangladesh's coast is already evident and experts predict it could be "catastrophic" if appropriate action is not taken now. Despite efforts to increase resilience, climate challenges continue to result in large economic losses, reducing economic growth and slowing progress in reducing poverty.

The bright side is that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in cooperation with the Bangladesh government have been tackling the crisis, in particular by addressing food security which is the number one threat in coastal areas.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), it is estimated that by 2050 rice production in Bangladesh will have declined by 8 percent and wheat by 32 percent compared with 1990 production levels. Both crops are staple food in Bangladesh.

One of the leading NGOs in Bangladesh - the Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust (COAST) - which has over 35 years of experiences of working mostly in the coastal areas, has been in the forefront of supporting the livelihoods of marginalised people. Md Jahirul Islam, a senior COAST official in Char Fasson, a remote coastal region barely 30 cm above sea level in the coastal district of Bhola, told IDN-INPS that "ancestral agricultural practices here are threatened, largely due to salt water intrusion. High salinity is toxic to many plants and we are now forced to seek alternative ways of growing crops."

However, the Coastal Integrated Technology Extension Programme (CITEP) being implemented by COAST in Char Fasson has been helping farmers since 2003 with alternative farming practices to improve crop production in the face of climate change.

As part of its capacity-building programmes, CITEP encourages farmers to use long raised rows of soil about one metre wide and 90 cm high for cultivating varieties of vegetables. The trenches between the rows are filled with water into which various types of fish are released for maturing. The water for irrigating the plants comes from nearby lakes filled with freshwater drawn from the Meghna River.

The advantage of using this technique is that it protects the crop land from inundation during storm surges, tidal waves and flash flooding and avoids high salinity.

Mizanur Rahman, CITEP project coordinator in Char Fasson, told IDN-INPS that "these low lands, about 30 km from the sea at the confluence of the Bay of Bengal, are prone to tidal waves and storm surges. So the new farming technique has been designed to protect them."

According to Aktar Hossain, a local farmer who is already benefitting from this alternative farming practice, "indigenous farming practices on flat land show that they are no longer reliable because saline water intrusion damages crops ... the new farming technique has not only proved that it is risk-free from hazardous weather but also offers opportunities for fish farming which gives individual farmers extra earnings."

The new farming practice has turned out to be very popular in Char Fasson, where over 9,000 farmers are now using it. Many farmers have also formed self-help groups where members benefit from sharing each others' experiences, while the government has been supporting adaptive measures such as fishing which fetches extra income.

Manzurul Islam, a local official of the government's agriculture department in Char Fasson, told IDN-INPS that "at the beginning, the challenges were huge because farmers refused to adapt to the new technique but, now that they have realised the benefits, farmers are convinced."

Losses of crops on flat lands are disastrous. Sadir Ahmad recalls three years ago "when crops on about 5,570 hectares of flat land were

damaged from four months of sea water inundation. Early this year in Razapur and Katiya, I witnessed huge chunks of land devoured by river erosion. Agriculture on huge areas suffered badly.”

Sea level rise is already evident in coastal Bangladesh. Estimations and projections show that 97.1 percent of coastal areas and over 35 million people living in coastal Bangladesh are vulnerable and exposed to multiple climate change hazards.

The Climate Change Vulnerability Index (CCVI) for 2014, which evaluated the sensitivity of populations, the physical exposure of countries, and governmental capacity to adapt to climate change over the following 30 years, ranks Bangladesh as the number one economy in the world at risk to climate change.

Globally, emissions of carbon dioxide and chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere are growing at a rate of 5 percent annually, according to a joint publication by COAST and the Equity and Justice Working Group (EJWG) on ‘Climate Change Impact and Disaster Vulnerabilities in the Coastal Areas of Bangladesh’.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Executive Director of COAST Trust and one of the authors of the joint publication, told IDN-INPS that “climate change is a serious issue for Bangladesh and there is no time for hypothetical analysis. We have already witnessed the damages and the ‘slow poison’ could prove catastrophic.”

“In preparing for the worst situation,” Karim continued, “we are placing the emphasis on building the capacities of the local

community so that internal migration does not put pressure on an already overwhelmed urban economy. These capacities include promoting salt tolerant crops, creating jobs through the establishment of new industries and increasing activities that reduce disaster vulnerabilities.”

Dr Jiban Krishna Biswas, Director-General of the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), told IDN-INPS that the institute “is already in the process of developing varieties of practices adaptable to fragile environments. With the changing frequency and intensity of climate-related events, we are now focusing on adapting to more modern technology in agriculture to confront the challenges.”

Speaking to IDN-INPS, Dr Atiq Rahman, Executive Director of the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) said that “sea level rise in Bangladesh is already evident and various adaptive measures are clear signs of it.” Dr Rahman, who is well-known globally for his pioneering role and contributions to the environment, nature conservation and the climate change debate, added that “it is presumed that by now about 20-28 cm of sea level rise has already taken place.”

He noted that the IPCC has predicted an 86 cm sea level rise by the end of the century, “but more recent data shows that Antarctica is melting very fast, which is obviously of great concern. This new data adds to the previous predictions. We anticipate it would be more than one metre by the end of the century. And this rise is not necessarily linear over time for every place.”

Asked about the impacts of climate change in Bangladesh’s coastal regions, eminent environmentalist Professor Ainun Nishat disagreed with those experts who claim that internal migration may have already started due to the effects of climate change.

He told IDN-INPS that “the land protection embankment at Char Fasson is 14 feet (over 4 metres) high [Bangladesh has similar embankments across its 700 km stretch of coastal zone], while the threat of storm surge or tidal waves is about 3 feet (90 cm). So, it is quite absurd that people would migrate in fear.”

However, he added, “I agree that Bhola is an area which is definitely impacted by climate change. By the turn of the century, the global temperature is predicted to increase by 0.8 degree Celsius. The impact of climate change has just started and there are indications of sea level rise in many parts of coastal Bangladesh.”

According to Professor Nishat, “at the moment, Bangladesh is 85 years ahead of the impacts that we are predicting. During the last two years, greenhouse gas emission is under control and Bangladesh is well prepared. What we need now are more funds and technology to improve our climate change strategies.” [IDN-InDepthNews – 22 May 2016]



Photo: Aktar Hossain, a local farmer who adapted the new technique in Aminabad in Char Fasson, shows good harvest of vegetable from his crop field | Naimul Haq

Photo: Image: Aftermath of Fiji Cyclone | Fiji Meteorological Service



South Pacific Seeks Action to Solve Climate “Terror” Not of Its Making

By Kalinga Seneviratne

BANGKOK (IDN) – Pointing out that three tiny South Pacific nations – Kiribati, Tuvalu and Marshall Islands – are “destined to slip below the waves altogether”, feisty Fijian Prime Minister Josaia Bainimarama has appealed to the international community to help Fiji and the other South Pacific island states build resilience to the impact of climatic change, which he described as the “terror of the extreme weather events”.

Addressing the opening of the 72nd UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) sessions (May 17-19) as outgoing chair, Bainimarama said: “History will judge the industrial nations very harshly if they leave small and vulnerable nations to their fate without extending the appropriate helping hand. We have not caused global warming. They have.”

He told ministers and senior officials from over 65 countries in the Asia-Pacific region that the industrial nations “must use a portion of the wealth they have derived from the carbon emissions of their industries to assist those of us who aren’t as wealthy as they are and are bearing the brunt of the crisis they created”.

On February 20 this year, the biggest cyclone ever to hit landfall in the southern hemisphere slammed into the Fiji Islands with wind speeds of over 300 km an hour, killing 44 people and destroying over 40,000 homes and 229 schools. The World Bank has estimated the total cost of damage at around 1.4 billion dollars.

“A single extreme weather event scoring a direct hit on us could devastate our economies for many years to come ... and reverse all the development gains that we have worked so hard to achieve,” noted Bainimarama, adding a sobering message that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will have no meaning in the South Pacific without concerted assistance from the international community to help the small vulnerable island nations to weather these threats.

“For all our talk of the 2030 Agenda, countries like Fiji have little or no hope of achieving their Sustainable Development Goals without the urgent assistance of the global community,” he warned.

“What Pacific Island leaders are highlighting is that those advanced countries which have more resources need to take a bigger share of responsibilities in terms of dealing cooperatively with these countries to find solutions to the problem,” Hamza Ali Malik, Chief of ESCAP’s Macroeconomic Policy and Analysis Section, told INPS in an interview.

Building resilience to climatic change is one of the three pillars that ESCAP is focusing on for achievement of the SDGs, Malik said. “Their (Pacific) economies are affected on a huge scale (and) one disaster takes them back several years in terms of development,” he noted.

“They don’t have capacity to deal with things like feeding people affected by these and rebuilding infrastructure, etc. We need to incor-

porate upfront in the development framework the trade-off necessary between environmental sustainability and economic growth.”

To demonstrate that Fiji is not just sitting there and waiting for international assistance to fall into its lap, Bainimarama’s government organised a well-attended side-event at the ESCAP sessions to demonstrate their determination to build resilience to climatic change terror threats.

Addressing the side-event, ESCAP’s Deputy Executive Director Kaveh Zahedi said that “building resilience (to climatic change) is not a choice but a necessity”. He suggested that disaster relief should not be the responsibility of one ministry alone but spread across all ministries, especially in the small vulnerable states like in the South Pacific.

“We need to change mindsets,” he argued, pointing out that threats from cyclones and similar weather patterns is not restricted to one nation but is cross-border in nature.

In a presentation, Dr Andi Eka Sakya, head of the Indonesian Agency for Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics, noted that because Indonesia is also an archipelago of small island states it has had ample experience in dealing with natural disaster precipitated by climatic change and thus the scope for South-South cooperation in this field in the region is ripe.

He explained how Indonesia continues to help Fiji in coping with the effects of and rebuilding after the February cyclone and In-

Indonesia has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with ESCAP for South-South cooperation in this field. "Indonesia has much experience in disaster management (and) we have developed long-term strategic planning," he noted, adding that in April Indonesia discussed the building of a Pacific Hub for facilitating disaster relief with ESCAP.

The Director-General of Thailand's Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, Chatchai Phromlert, told the meeting that following the 2005 Asian tsunami, Thailand has built up experience and resources in responding to climatic change and natural disasters. "We are aware of the need for regional cooperation," he said, and "we want to focus more on pro-active programmes than reactive ones."

Building systems of resilience to the impact of climatic change weather patterns is important for achieving SDGs in the South Pacific, argued Fiji's Minister of Agriculture, Maritime and Rural Development, Inia Seruiratu. "We need to introduce transformative changes," he said. "We need to change the way we live. We need to embrace disaster and climate risks as our new normal."

Fiji has called for blending disaster risk assessment into SDG plans and adding it to the SDGs as goal number 18.

In his presentation to Fiji's side-event, the minister noted that while the focus on poverty reduction in the SDGs is important, it needs to be balanced with addressing climatic risks.

Addressing a plenary discussion, Tuvalu's Deputy Prime Minister Maatia Toafa said that the "challenges of climate change are enormous for a micro-state like Tuvalu. In addition to the physical impacts of climate change that the country is experiencing, we are also dealing with the difficulty of accessing global climate funds ... to build adaptive capacity by climate-proofing critical infrastructure."

Pointing out that his government has established the Tuvalu Survival Fund with a capital infusion of 5 million dollars to finance recovery and rehabilitation from climate change impacts and disasters, he said that "after the devastating effect of Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015, we learnt that we need this fund because of the unavailability of appropriate insurance" and invited ESCAP member countries to contribute to this fund.

In addition to climatic change, another major impediment to sustainable development in small Pacific Islands is extreme dependence on fossil fuels for their energy needs, as pointed out in a report released at the ESCAP meeting on the sustainable development issues facing Asia-Pacific countries with "special needs" (CSN).

Dubbed the CSN report, it points out that while the small island states of the South Pacific face severe disadvantages due to their small size, remoteness that deprives them easy access to major markets, a limited export base and regular environmental problems (such as cyclones), a major impediment for their sustainable development is their high dependence on imported petroleum fuel for electricity generation.

With 365 days of ample sunshine, surrounded by seas and accompanying winds, these islands have much scope to tap into solar, geothermal and wind power, but, investments in such renewable energy sources in most of the Pacific Island countries is very low.

Even attempts to harness wind energy have been affected by climatic change-driven cyclones. As Masakazu Hamachi, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, pointed out in a panel discussion, even when Tonga installed wind power generators, cyclones blew the blades away.

Meanwhile, in talks between Fiji's Prime Minister and ESCAP Executive Secretary Dr Shamshad Akther, the two parties have tentatively agreed to the establishment of a climate change centre in Fiji to provide practical training and capacity-building for small and vulnerable states. [IDN-In-DepthNews - 20 May 2016]

Asian UN Body Calls for Paradigm Shift in Development Thinking

By Kalinga Seneviratne

BANGKOK (IDN) - The major United Nations agency overseeing development in the Asia-Pacific region has called for a major rethink in the development paradigm for the region.

In an 'Economic and Social Survey' of the region presented to its 72nd sessions here from May 17 to 19, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) says that while the centre of global economic gravity continues to move eastwards, the time has come for the Asia-Pacific region to adopt a development model that relies more on domestic and regional demand.

Arguing that it is futile to continue the exclusive reliance on export-led development, ESCAP is also calling for more rural agriculture and industrial development, with better rural-urban connectivity via transport and communication links.

"These challenges can be partially met through enhanced domestic resource mobilisation, given the exceptional tax potential of the region. Unlocking this potential will require countries to abolish tax holidays and exemptions that are distorting investment regimes," ESCAP's Executive Secretary Dr Shamshad Akther said in an opening address.

"Progressivity of taxation systems will help to tackle inequalities and direct flows to more sustainable investments," she argued, pointing out that the region has good potential "to strengthen enabling environments to tap capital for sustainability" because it holds global liquidity close to 100 trillion dollars and sovereign wealth funds worth about 3 trillion dollars.

The economic outlook for Asia-Pacific is broadly stable, argues the report, predicting a growth estimated at 4.6 percent last year to increase marginally to 5 percent in 2017.

With the prospect for export-led growth uncertain due to economic woes in Europe and Japan as well as the United States, it is a shift in development strategy towards increasing domestic demand and productivity that will drive the regional economies of the future, says ESCAP.

"One of the fundamental issues we are raising in our survey is low wages," Hamza Ali Malik, Chief of ESCAP's Macroeconomic Policy and

Analysis Section, told IDN-INPS in an interview. "If the region is to have sustainable development, it has to enhance productivity (and) you need a high level of productivity to support a high level of real wages."

In a high-level discussion at the sessions here, there was broad agreement that monetary policy has failed and that fiscal policy now needs to be given more prominence, with governments using increased tax revenue to stimulate economic growth by investing in health, education and infrastructure development that would enhance productivity in the long term.

Dr Supachai Panitchipakdi, former head of the Geneva-based UNCTAD, said that monetary policies are now dysfunctional and, with global trade on the decline in recent years, Asia will need to escape the low-labour cost, export-oriented development model. UNCTAD is UN agency dealing with development issues, particularly international trade - the main driver of development.

"We tend to ignore the income policy side which has been highlighted in this ESCAP report," noted Dr Supachai. "(Along with an increase in productivity) we need to look at income policy as a whole ... when we talk of productivity increase we need to look at how to transform that to income increase. Many countries have been successful in increasing their productivity levels, but income levels has stayed behind." This, it was argued, creates asset bubbles not increased domestic consumption.

Teuea Toatu, Minister of Finance and Economic Development of Kiribati, noted that productivity-driven economic growth is possible and his small isolated Pacific Island country has been able to demonstrate that it is not a "hopeless dream".

He explained that Kiribati government has realised that the knowledge and skill level of its small labour force needed to be improved and it has thus invested in education as well as health services. It has also doubled the price of copra that the government purchases from rural farmers for export.

"Rural economy must be developed through inclusive policies," argued Toatu. "Subsidies for the purchase of copra help to increase



production and keep the rural farmers on their land rather than migrating to the city.”

According to Thailand’s Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Vitavas Srivihok, increasing digital literacy, especially of students in isolated rural schools, is an important government policy to educate the population for future productivity growth. He explained that the Thai king’s ‘Sufficiency Economy’ model being introduced to rural areas is based on “working with local communities to build strength and resilience from within”.

“In South Asia, most farmers are small farmers (and) raising their productivity is a big challenge,” Arjun Bahadur Thapa, Secretary-General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) told the meeting. “We need to educate and equip small farmers with technology to increase production.”

Taking the cue from Africa and Latin America, SAARC is encouraging the use of ‘farm radio’ to educate farmers because it is a cheap avenue of educating them, he added, while pointing out that most training institutes are located in urban areas.

For Malik, the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 that the UN system is promoting are about taking a holistic approach to development. “Rather than saying let’s grow (economically) first and then deal with social or environment issues, what we are saying now is, no, let’s look at the trade-offs in all three issues at the same time,” he pointed out. “That’s a paradigm shift in the way you think of development.”

“It’s a move away from focusing only on the economic growth or production aspect, and saying that human welfare is much more important than economic growth,” argued Malik. “Yes, it (economic growth) is important but it’s not the whole story. That is what the whole UN system is now pursuing.” [IDN-InDepthNews - 19 May 2016]

Photo: ESCAP

Africans Vow to Promote Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialization

By Jeffrey Moyo



HARARE (IDN) - The third Pan African Capacity Development Forum organized by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), in partnership with the organisation's Pan-African and international partners, has vowed to boost industry together with infrastructure, in order to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation in line with the ninth goal of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

As such, the organisation says it has invested more than \$1 billion, building institutions in 45 countries on the African continent and supporting regional economic communities as well as continental organisations.

The SDGs were built on the eight anti-poverty targets that the world committed to achieving by 2015, dubbed the Millennium Development Goals.

The ACBF Forum, from May 2 to 5 in Harare, the Zimbabwean capital, aimed to capacitate the underdeveloped continent by focussing on building resilient infrastructure across Africa.

This year's ACBF forum ran under the theme 'Developing Capacity for Africa's Economic and Social Transformation'. The forum also came as the organisation celebrated its Silver Jubilee, this after it was established in 1991 by African governments and their development partners to help build sustainable human and institutional capacity for good governance and development management.

To this, the organisation urged African governments to work towards developing the continent's infrastructure.

"Ministers of Finance and Planning, multilateral agencies, funding partners, academics and representatives from ACBF-supported institutions should consider the capacity dimensions on African Union's Agenda 2063 and Sustainable Development Goals," ACBF executive secretary

Emmanuel Nnadozie, said at the forum.

This, he said, would be done with emphasis on the role of governments, development partners, civil society, private sector, training institutions and the media in supporting the development of capacity for Africa's economic and social transformation.

Nnadozie believes that nothing should be impossible for Africa as it braces to sustainably develop itself. Some of the world's fastest-growing economies, he said, have moved a gear up in achieving the UN SDGs as they have attained their success through strategic investments in human, institutional and organisational capacities.

In line with the SDGs endorsed by world leaders in September 2015 to increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises, the ACBF also made calls for increased industrialisation across the continent.

"Accelerated, inclusive, transformative real growth with equity is no longer an option, but an imperative for Africa in order to, in a significant way, create jobs, tackle poverty and gain rapid resilient inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development," AU Commissioner for Economic Affairs Anthony Mothae Maruping, told IDN.

With Goal 9 of the the SDGs also calling to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment, Maruping said: "Diversification and value addition would result in an accelerated, inclusive, job-creating growth and economies that are more resilient to external and, indeed even internal shocks."

But Africa does not have enough skills to salvage its own industrial growth, according to ACBF. As such, according to Maruping, ACBF should also focus on the human retention skills as part of efforts to ease human capital flight within the continent. He is apparently in agreement with Professor Emmanuel Nnadozie, Executive Secretary of the ACBF.

"To achieve economic, political and social transformation, we will need critical skills and a change of mindsets" said Professor Nnadozie. When asked to elaborate on what that meant in real terms, Nnadozie stressed the need to develop skills, such as more engineers,

more agronomists, and more managers.

Nnadozie said that currently Africa had a gap of 4.3m engineers if the continent was to implement all its flagship projects. "We need 1.6 million agricultural scientists and researchers; we have identified a gap of 2.8 million water and sanitation engineers. And this relates to the targeted needs identified for 2023 - the 10-year target for the first leg of Africa 2063".

Right now over 80% of students are enrolling in social sciences and humanities and there needs to be a conscious effort to stem this trend and direct more students towards the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and maths).

Countries on the continent would need to improve their institutional and human capacity to be able to achieve goals set under AU's Agenda 2063 as well as the UNSDGs.

However, lack of money has turned out to be a huge challenge for the developing continent, with ACBF being sustained by donor funding, and this at a time when calls are getting louder for African governments to take charge of their own organisation.

But this may be a huge task for many countries like Zimbabwe whose economy is hanging by a slim thread.

This Southern African nation's Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Patrick Chinamasa has been on record in the media saying fixing the troubled country's economy requires stakeholder participation.

But as per the UNSDG to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all, it remains to be seen whether ACBF would manage to provide some of the answers to the continent's increasing economic woes. [IDN-InDepth-News - 8 May 2016]

Photo: The Africa Capacity Building Foundation is determined to speed up infrastructural development on the continent, but donor dependence has been discouraged for the organization, with countries like Zimbabwe which are struggling to revive its broken down infrastructure faced by a crumbling economy | Jeffrey Moyo

Adolescent Girls in Bangladesh Defend Right to Learning

By Naimul Haq

COX'S BAZAR | Bangladesh (IDN) - Many young girls drop out from schools in Bangladesh largely due to poverty and poverty related causes. But strong motivations for continuing education have changed the scenario over the past few years.

Despite the practices of patriarchy and traditional beliefs against girls' education and employment in mostly poor families in the rural areas, adolescent girls in many regions of Bangladesh have demonstrated how defying such traditions can actually benefit their lives.

Shonglap - or dialogue that calls for capacity building or developing occupational skills and offers livelihood opportunities for marginalised groups of people in the society - has made a positive impact encouraging them to learn.

Ummey Salma, who quit school in 2011 due to extreme poverty, has joined Shonglap in South Delpara of Khurushkul in coastal Cox's Bazar district. In a group of 29 adolescent girls, Ummey, who lost her father in 2009, has been playing a leading role among the girls who meet six-days a week in the Shonglap session held at a rented thatched home in suburb Delpara.

Youngest of the 7, Ummey, who wishes to be a lawyer, told IDN, "I had to drop out of school because my widow mother needed me to contribute to family earning. So I gave up lessons in grade 9 and joined her helping in domestic chores."

With Ummey assisting, her mother earns as little as US\$ 31 a month which is barely enough to support the eight-member family - although her small income is also supplemented by her elder brothers fishing in the deep sea.

Ummey continued: "After about a year working as helping hand in a furniture factory I realized that if I had completed my education I would surely earn more than what the entire family contributes. So, with that in mind I decided to go back to school and also acquired life skill knowledge to earn while continuing education."

Ummey is one of about 3,000 adolescents in Cox's Bazaar who returned to schools after the informal coaching on basic school lessons

and life skills training like stitching, repairing electronic goods, rearing domestic animals, running small tea shops, pottery, wood works and many such activities that generate income.

Jahangir Alam, Programme Manager of Shonglap Programme of COAST that executes the programme in Cox's Bazar told IDN, "Those who graduate are also supported with interest free loans to start business - and so far over 1,500 such girls are regular earning members supporting their families."

Ruksana Aktar, peer leader of the group in Delpara said: "Shonglap is basically a platform for less privileged adolescent girls to unite and gather strength through common dialogues. Such chemistry for 12 months gives them the moral strength to regain on the lost hope they once thought was the only way."

Twelve-year-old Rozina Aktar had never been to school. She joined the group of girls in Shonglap in Delpara and after five months of her union with the group she was convinced that education and training on income generation were the energy behind life.

In tears the orphan girl told IDN, "I could not attend school because my uncle, who I live with, is too poor to afford my school uniform and pay registration fees (US\$12 for each child during admission). But Shonglap has arranged my admission to a state run school - Shikhon - where they charge nothing at entry."

According to a study titled, 'School Drop Out in Bangladesh: New Insights from Longitudinal Evidence' carried out by Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity or CREATE, an estimated 45 percent girls in the secondary schools drop out despite high rates of enrollment of nearly 97 percent.

The CREATE study during 2007-2009 showed that apart from the common reasons like poor health, poor sanitation, teacher absenteeism, lack of appropriate care, repetitions in classes and distance from home, poverty remained on the top of the list.

Rashed K Chowdhury, Executive Director of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Bangladesh's leading think-tank advocating for children's education told IDN, "Educational exclusion for girls is a major



problem, especially in socio-cultural context in Bangladesh. Girls are still married early despite stringent laws against such punishable acts. Adolescent girls are encouraged to stay home after puberty to ensure 'security' and the most common reason is girls are used as earning members to supplement family income."

Rasheda also said, "I believe such an approach of building opportunities for youth entrepreneurship to poor girls (for income generating activities) who wish to continue education, can considerably change their lives."

Rozina is one of over 116,000 adolescents who have successfully returned to school since 2006 after several years or in some cases, months of break. "Shonglap gives me a new life," said the shy little girl who recently graduated from stitching lessons for income.

Shonglap is designed to customize the needs of individual participants. Those returning to school attend in a prefixed life skill course of 9 months and then go

on to learn income generating activities (IGA) for three months, facilitated by the peer leaders of her group. Such life skill 2-hourly-sessions are held six days a week. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, Executive Director of COAST, told IDN, "The journey at the beginning was not so smooth as because Cox's Bazar is a highly religious society that restricts adolescent girls in public. So, assembling dropped out girls from schools was not an easy task." Rezaul continued, "Our challenge was to convince the parents and religious leaders who had literally opposed our approach but later realized that empowering adolescent girls had great benefits."

Each Shonglap centre has a Shonglap Support Team (SST) comprising of parents, local leaders and local government bodies.

At the community level, SSTs and adolescent girls play a key role as they take the lead in social actions, such as protesting against child marriage and dowry payment. Due to the involvement of community people they can understand the potentials of the beneficiaries (girls) and become active to support and protect the girls even in a conservative society. Mizanur Rahman, Head of Programmes, Stromme Foundation in Bangladesh told IDN, "Shonglap helps them to be more enlightened with knowledge and information to challenge the social odds specially violence against girls and all forms of discrimination against women. Not surprisingly, many rigid parents give more support in delaying girls' marriage and protecting children from abuse and violence."

Shonglap, spread over 33 districts in Bangladesh through a network of over 4,600 such groups, aims to give voices to the neglected girls and enable them to negotiate their own rights for life. The programme is being implemented by COAST and other NGOs with funding from Stromme Foundation of Norway. [IDN-InDepthNews – 29 April 2016]

Photo: Adolescents in Delpara at a Shonglap session | Naimul Haq

Istanbul Summit to Find Ways Out of Humanitarian Crises

By Ramesh Jaura



BERLIN | NEW YORK (IDN) - It is an open secret that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has put his heart into the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit set for May 23 and 24 in Istanbul, the most populous city in Turkey and the country's economic, cultural, and historic hub.

If successful, the Summit would go down in history as his lasting legacy. Because it symbolizes a cupola supported by four columns: the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk

Reduction, Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement.

The crux of Ban's message since September 2015, when world leaders endorsed 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets: "I call upon global leaders to place

humanity - the concern for the dignity, safety and well-being of our citizens - at the forefront of all policies, strategies and decision-making. The World Humanitarian Summit must be for the people living on the frontline of humanity. They count on us. We cannot let them down."

Indeed. Because humanity is confronting some of the greatest challenges of our time. In 2015, 125 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance. 60 million were forced from their homes. 37 countries were affected. An estimated US\$20 billion were needed.

Ban explained the significance of the Summit in detail in his opening remarks at launch of Report for World Humanitarian Summit 'One Humanity, Shared Responsibility' on February 9, 2016 at the UN Headquarters in New York.

"We face profound, urgent and growing global challenges . . . Brutal and seemingly intractable conflicts are devastating the lives of millions

and destabilizing entire regions. Violent extremism, terrorism and transnational crime are creating persistent instability,” he told member states.

“The widening gap between rich and poor is marginalizing and alienating the most vulnerable in society. Climate change is having a profound impact with increasingly frequent and intense storms, floods and droughts. Levels of need are at record levels, but the political solutions to relieve them are elusive. Today’s complex challenges cross borders and surpass the capacity of any single country or institution to cope,” Ban added.

Against this backdrop, he declared: “We need to restore trust in our global world order and in the capacities of our national and regional institutions to confront these challenges effectively. We need to show the millions of people living in conflict – with chronic needs and constant fear – the solidarity that they deserve and expect.”

The urgency of these challenges and the scale of the suffering mean that the international community must accept its shared responsibilities and act decisively, with compassion and resolve.

“The World Humanitarian Summit is the moment for us to come together to renew our commitment to humanity and the unity and cooperation required to prevent and end crisis and reduce people suffering and vulnerability,” he declared.

The UN Secretary-General’s Agenda for Humanity calls on global leaders to commit to five core responsibilities in the name of our shared humanity.

CORE RESPONSIBILITY 1 – Global leadership to prevent and end conflict: Preventing conflicts and finding political solutions to resolve them is our first and foremost responsibility to humanity. Because conflicts drive 80% of all humanitarian needs.

CORE RESPONSIBILITY 2 – Uphold the norms that safeguard humanity: Every day, civilians are deliberately or indiscriminately killed in wars. We are witnessing the erosion of 150 years of international humanitarian law. But even wars have limits: leaders must recommit to upholding the rules that protect humanity.

Because 90% of people killed or injured by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas are civilians.

CORE RESPONSIBILITY 3 - Leave no one behind: The World

Humanitarian Summit is the first test of our commitment to transform the lives of those most at risk of being left behind.

This means reaching everyone and empowering all women, men, girls and boys to be agents of positive transformation. It means reducing displacement, supporting refugees and migrants, ending gaps in education and fighting to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence.

CORE RESPONSIBILITY 4 - Change people’s lives – from delivering aid to ending need: Success must now be measured by how people’s vulnerability and risk are reduced, not by how needs are met year after year.

Ending need will require three fundamental shifts in the way we work: Reinforce, don’t replace national systems; Anticipate, do not wait for crises; Transcend the humanitarian-development divide. This is particularly important considering that today, 43% of people live in fragile situations. By 2030 that number is estimated to climb to 62%.

CORE RESPONSIBILITY 5 - Invest in humanity: Accepting and acting upon our shared responsibilities for humanity requires political, institutional and financial investment.

As a shift is needed from funding to financing that invests in local capacities, is risk-informed, invests in fragile situations and incentivizes collective outcomes. We must also reduce the funding gap for humanitarian needs. In 2014, only 0.4% of official development assistance was spent on disaster preparedness. [IDN-InDepthNews – 22 April 2016]

Photo: Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (left) addresses a meeting to brief Member States on April 4, 2016 on the preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), set for 23-24 May in Istanbul, Turkey. At his side is Stephen O’Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator | Evan Schneider | UN Photo

Investing in Forests the Next Big Thing for Development Agenda

By Fabíola Ortiz

WASHINGTON, D.C. (IDN) - Investing in forests has become the next big thing as an essential segment of the development solution, whether for meeting climate goals, coping with extreme weather, boosting livelihoods, greening supply chains or carbon sinking. However, the world has lost 50 soccer fields of forests every minute, every day, over the last twenty years.

"This is a great tragedy," says Andrew Steer, President and CEO of the World Resources Institute (WRI), a global research organization that works in more than 50 countries.

Managing forests has been difficult, he adds. Around one fifth of the global population (1.3 billion people) relies on forests for livelihoods.

According to the World Bank, about 350 million people live within or close to dense forests depending directly on them for their subsistence. And of those, nearly 60 million people – especially indigenous communities – are completely dependent on forests.

"Forests are also critically important to the stability of our planet's vital systems. They help regulate our water supplies, sustain agricultural production and protect infrastructure. And they help the planet tackle the impacts of climate change by absorbing CO₂ from the atmosphere and enhancing the resilience of natural systems to climate shocks," said World Bank Group Managing Director Sri Mulyani Indrawati.

Forests were a focal point in one special session during the IMF (International Monetary Fund)/World Bank 2016 Spring Meetings from

April 14-17 in Washington D.C.

According to Indrawati, there is a growing global recognition of the critical role forests play in supporting sustainable development and lifting people out of poverty. The World Bank is the largest multilateral financier of the forest agenda. Between 2002 and 2015, the institution supported 300 forest related operations with US\$ 15.7 billion.

"This is why forests were included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The World Bank seeks to make sustainable management of forests an integral part of the global agenda. They are key pillar of our new climate change action plan. This is the momentum we are seeing for new and better pathway for forests," he stressed.

World leaders and governments will sign the United Nations Climate Agreement on April 22, which includes an explicit call to nations to conserve and enhance forests and other biological carbon reservoirs. If governments representing at least 55 percent of the global annual carbon emissions ratify the Paris accord, it will enter into force.

Currently, forest and land use contribute only 25 percent of the total emissions reduction pledged so far by governments in their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) under the agreement.

Data released on April 21 shows that they could contribute much more, given their huge potential to act as carbon sinks, safely removing CO₂ emissions from the atmosphere.

The study "Forests: The Bridge to a Fossil-Free Future", by the Woods Hole Research Center – an independent research institute that investigates the causes and effects of climate change to identify and implement opportunities for conservation, restoration and economic development – show that with proper management, forests, particularly those in the tropics, could remove significant quantities of CO₂ from the atmosphere, making it much easier to limit global warming to 2°C.

A scenario of "aggressive management" of tropical forests would increase by ten to fifteen years the time available to eliminate fossil fuel use.

"We cannot succeed in fighting global warming unless we stop deforestation in the tropics. Protecting and managing forests not only make sense from the climate perspective, it is also smart for the economy. Forests are key economic resources and protecting them will increase resilience to climate change, reduce poverty, and help preserve invaluable biodiversity," said Tone Skogen, the State Secretary of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Norway is investing annually around US\$ 400 million in rainforests.

In her opinion, without ambitious global action to tackle the loss of tropical forests, the 2°C target is simply out of reach. By the second half of the century, the globe needs to achieve a balance between emissions and cutting greenhouse gas (GHG).

Reducing emission of deforestation could bring about one third of the GHG reductions by 2030 to keep in a 2°C trajectory. Some countries like Colombia are showing to be deeply engaged in achieving a zero deforestation rate by 2020 and restoring million hectares.

Half of the Colombian territory is covered by forests, in which two thirds are in the Amazon basin. The deforestation figures in the past reached a fast pace of about 300,000 hectares a year, mainly due to the ongoing armed conflict in the country.

“It’s been five decades of conflict that affected deforestation in many ways, illicit drug production, illegal mining and displacement of people. We are putting a lot of emphasis on ending the conflict, it is going to be good for the environment and for the forest,” said Mauricio Cardenas, Minister of Finance and Public Credit adding that Colombia is at the forefront of the global debate when it comes to reducing carbon emissions and protecting the forests.

One of the main aspects of the peace talks with the guerrilla movement Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is precisely putting an end to deforestation and converting ex-combatants as forest workers. “One way to absorb those illegal groups is putting them in charge of protecting our forests, paying people to protect the forests as green guards.”

Another important actor that should be engaged in this process are indigenous communities. In Latin America, 40 percent of the forest is controlled by indigenous peoples.

According to the indigenous rights activist

from Nicaragua, Myrna Kay Cunningham Kain, who is chairperson of the Center for Autonomy and Development of Indigenous People (CADPI), the amount of forests and territories controlled by indigenous peoples worldwide it is expected to double by 2030.

“If governments and private sector don’t work with the indigenous peoples in this issue, we will not be able to accomplish the goals. Conflicts arise when we do not participate, when the free prior and informed consultations are not very well implemented and when our leaders are criminalized,” declared Kain.

She belongs to the indigenous Miskito community of Waspam located on the banks of the River Wangki in Nicaragua. “For us, forest is our home, where we pray, it has spiritual and cultural value. We have a different perception of what forest means for indigenous peoples. We have the right to own and use our territories, it is in the international legislation.”

Forests owned and managed by indigenous peoples and local communities contain approximately 37.7 billion tons of carbon – 29 times more than the annual emissions of the world’s passenger vehicles. Secure rights to indigenous and community-held land protect against deforestation and can generate significant large-scale returns, says a new report released on April 21 by the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI)

Only 21 INDCs out of 162 submissions, representing 13 percent of the world’s tropical and subtropical forest area, included clear commitments to implement community-based tenure or natural resource management

strategies as part of their climate change mitigation plans or adaptation actions.

According to the study, this illustrates the “significant gap” between the recognition that securing indigenous peoples and local communities’ land rights is fundamentally important for achieving both sustainable development and climate change targets, and the willingness of states to implement needed reforms.

It is today a new vision in vogue of having the so-called “landscape approach” to manage forestry and at the same time reconcile with agricultural needs and recover degraded land, Miguel Calmon, Senior Manager, Landscape Restoration Knowledge, Tools and Capacity of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) told IDN.

“It is a good thing to invest in forests. There are over 2 billion hectares of degraded land that were forest in the past and create currently no benefits for society. We need to convert those devastated areas into more productive ones generating environmental services. Nowadays we all agree that working together in a more integrated way will make us achieve common goals,” Calmon added.

[IDN-InDepthNews – 21 April 2016]



Photo: 'Think Forest' Panel during IMF/World Bank Spring Meeting. Credit: Fabiola Ortiz.

Achieving UN Goal of Development Aid Remains an Uphill Task

By Jaya Ramachandran

PARIS | NEW YORK (IDN) - Revitalizing the global partnership is Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic Summit at the UN headquarters in New York.

It urges developed countries to implement fully their official development assistance (ODA) commitments, including the commitment to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of the Gross National Income (GNI) given as ODA to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20 per cent to least developed countries.

“ODA providers are encouraged to consider setting a target to provide at least 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries,” says one of the Goal 17 targets endorsed by the world leaders.

The Agenda came into force on January 1, 2016. But the 2015 figures released by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the 34-nation Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicate that it would be an uphill task to reach an important target of Goal 17 in the next 15 years.

Measured in real terms – correcting for inflation and for a sharp depreciation in many DAC country currencies against the dollar – ODA was up 83% since 2000, when the Millennium Development Goals were agreed.

But in 2015, only six of the 28 DAC countries – Denmark, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom – met a United Nations target to keep ODA at or above 0.7% of GNI. Net ODA as per cent of GNI was 0.30% in 2015, on par with 2014.

According to official data collected by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), ODA rose in 22 countries in 2015, with the biggest increases in Greece, Sweden and Germany. Six countries reported lower ODA, with the steepest declines in Portugal and Australia.

Of the several non-DAC members who report their aid flows to the OECD body, the United Arab Emirates posted the highest ODA/GNI ratio in 2015 at 1.09%.

ODA totalled USD 131.6 billion in 2015, signifying a rise of 6.9% from 2014 in real terms as aid spent on refugees in host countries more than doubled in real terms to USD 12 billion. Stripping out funds spent on refugees, aid was up 1.7% in real terms.

Funds spent on hosting or processing refugees in donor countries accounted for 9.1% of ODA in 2015, up from 4.8% in 2014, when in-donor refugee costs totalled USD 6.6 billion. The rise in refugee costs did not significantly eat into development programmes, with around half of donor countries using money from outside their aid budgets to cover refugee costs, according to DAC findings.

“Countries have had to find large sums to cover the costs of an historic refugee crisis in Europe, and most have so far avoided diverting money from development programmes. These efforts must continue. We also welcome that more aid is being provided to the poorest countries,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría.

“Governments must ensure that development aid keeps rising. They also need to develop long-term options for meeting future refugee costs and the integration of refugees in our societies, while ensuring at the same time that ODA reaches those countries and people that need it the most,” Gurría added.

An unprecedented 1.5 million refugees claimed asylum in OECD countries in 2015, more than a million in Europe. DAC rules allow member countries to count certain refugee-related expenses as ODA for the first year after their arrival.

Three countries – Australia, Korea and Luxembourg – do not count refugee costs as ODA. Others – Austria, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden – saw refugee costs account for more than 20% of their ODA in 2015.

The 2015 data show that bilateral aid to the poorest countries rose by 4% in real terms, in line with commitments by DAC donors to reverse recent declines. Bilateral aid, making up around two-thirds of ODA, is aid provided by one country to another country. A survey of donor spending plans through 2019 suggests flows to the poorest countries will keep rising.

Humanitarian aid rose by 11% in real terms to USD 13.6 billion in 2015. Net debt relief grants fell by 36% in real terms and represented 0.2% of total net ODA in 2015, compared to about 20% in 2005 and 2006 when debt relief was at its highest level due to exceptional measures for Iraq and Nigeria.

Preliminary estimates show that within net bilateral aid, grants rose by 9% in real terms from 2014, however, excluding grants for in-donor refugee costs, they rose by 0.4%. Non-grant net flows rose by 26% in real terms.

Bilateral aid to the group of least developed countries was USD 25 billion, an increase of 4% in real terms compared to 2014, thus marking a slight rebound in aid after several years of diminishing flows to this group of countries.

Bilateral ODA to sub-Saharan Africa was USD 24 billion, representing an increase of 2% in real terms from 2014; it also rose to the African continent as a whole, by 1% in real terms to USD 27 billion.

Net ODA rose in 22 countries, with the largest increases recorded in Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Sweden. For some, the large increases were due to in-donor refugee costs. Excluding these costs, net ODA still rose in twenty countries. By contrast, total net ODA fell in six countries, with the largest decreases recorded in Australia and Portugal.

G7 countries – Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the U.S. – provided 72% of total net DAC ODA in 2015, and the DAC-EU countries 56%.

ODA makes up more than two thirds of external finance for least-developed countries and the DAC is pushing for it to be used more as a lever to generate private investment and domestic tax revenues in poor countries. The DAC is also looking at clarifying the rules for which refugee costs can be counted as ODA.

“We need to remember that the best way to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and avoid future refugee crises is to continue the current momentum of aid flows, particularly to the neediest and most fragile countries,” said DAC Chair Erik Solheim.

“I am glad that we have reversed the recent declines in aid to the poorest countries and that most countries aren’t spending large amounts of their ODA on hosting refugees,” Solheim added. [IDN-InDepthNews – 16 April 2016]

Photo: UN



Sustainable Development Crucial to Countering Terrorism

By Jaya Ramachandran

GENEVA (IDN) - Within days of the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington that considered modes of averting nuclear materials falling into the hands of terrorists, possible ways of Preventing Violent Extremism drew the focus of a UN conference in Geneva.

The conference on April 7-8 was held against the backdrop that terrorist groups such as ISIL, Al-Qaida and Boko Haram have come to embody the image of violent extremism and the debate about how to address this threat.

An important element of a plan to counter all kinds of terrorism, according to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, has to be full implementation of the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), because fulfilment of these goals will address many of the socioeconomic drivers of violent extremism. The SDGs highlight women's empowerment and youth engagement, because societies with higher equality and inclusion are less vulnerable to violent extremism.

The phenomenon of violent extremism conducive to terrorism is not rooted or confined to any religion, region, nationality or ethnic group. In fact, the vast majority of victims worldwide are Muslims, Ban said, hitting the nail on the head at the Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism. "The objective of violent extremists is not necessarily to turn on us. It is for us to turn on each other. Their biggest mission is not the action; it is the reaction. The aim is to divide communities. The goal is to let fear rule," he added.

Calling for an "ultimate rebuke to that bankrupt strategy", Ban declared: Violent extremists pose a direct threat to the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. "They undermine our collective efforts to maintain peace and security, foster sustainable development, promote the respect for human rights and deliver much needed humanitarian aid," he added, addressing a wide and interrelated spectrum of issues. He pleaded for harnessing young people's energy, which in his view is a key "building block" in the global quest to prevent violent extremism. "We will not be successful unless we can harness the idealism, creativity and energy of 1.8 billion young people around the world. They are looking to us to demonstrate vision, courage and leadership."

Ban stressed that violent extremism is clearly a transnational threat that requires urgent international cooperation. Because the terrorist groups control territory, resources and populations. They are fuelling protracted conflicts. They have blurred borders between sovereign States. The spread of violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism, has further aggravated an already unprecedented humanitarian crisis which transcends any one region.

Local populations are paying the highest price. Millions are fleeing their homes in horror and fear, in a desperate search for safety for their families, the UN Chief declared.

This challenge is all the more imperative because of the growing threat that chemical, biological, radiological or even nuclear materials could be acquired and used by violent extremists. This is a clear and present danger and the UN is working to prevent such a complex emergency, Ban assured.

In this context, he referred to his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (A/RES/70/254), adopted by consensus on February 12, 2016.



Member States, he had welcomed the initiative and stressed that it is essential to address the threat posed by violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism. This recognized that violent extremism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group.

The Plan of Action puts forward a comprehensive and balanced approach for concerted action at the global, regional and national levels. It is based on five interrelated points.

Number one: put prevention first. Evidence shows that security and military responses alone cannot defeat the scourge of terrorism. In fact, sometimes such responses have proven to be counterproductive. "For example, when efforts ignore the rule of law and violate fundamental rights, they not only betray the values they seek to uphold, but can also end up further fuelling violent extremism," said Ban.

Policies that turn people against each another and alienate already marginalized groups play into the hands of the very violent extremists that we seek to counteract, he added.

While there is need to engage without delay and address the drivers of violent extremism, there is no single pathway and no complex algorithm that can unlock the secrets of who turns to violent extremism, Ban said.

"But, we know that violent extremism flourishes when aspirations for inclusion are frustrated, marginalized groups linger on the sidelines of societies, political space shrinks, human rights are abused and when too many people – especially young people – lack prospects and meaning in their lives.

The Secretary-General's plan emphasizes conflict prevention, conflict resolution and political solutions that are based on listening and responding to the legitimate demands of people. Resolving longstanding conflicts and giving hope to those enduring oppression will help eradicate the breeding ground of violent extremism, leading to terrorism, he added.

Number two: national ownership. The Plan offers a menu of recommendations for Member States to forge their own national plans of action based on national ownership. These national plans of action should use an "all-of-government" approach and engage "all-of-society" to be effective.

Preventing violent extremism also requires support from religious and community leaders, women's leaders, heads of youth groups and leaders in the arts, music and sports, as well as the media and private sector. "We must break down the silos between the peace and security, sustainable development, human rights and humanitarian actors at the national, regional and global levels," Ban said.

Number three: preventing violent extremism requires increased international cooperation. No country or region alone can address the threat of violent extremism. A dynamic, coherent and multidimensional response from the entire international community is required. "I pledge to leverage the universal membership and the convening power of the UN to further strengthen international cooperation at the national, regional and global levels," the UN Chief added.

Number four: United Nations support. Under the framework of Pillars I and IV of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the UN stands ready to share expertise among Member States and support them in addressing the drivers of violent extremism through an "all-of-UN" system-wide approach. There is much that the UN is already doing to implement these Pillars at the global, regional and national levels.

The review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in June 2016, Ban said, would seek to effectively mainstream the concept of preventing violent extremism into the work of the UN with the support of Member States. "

"I plan to create a UN system-wide high-level PVE [prevention of violent extremism] action group to spearhead the implementation of the Plan at both the Headquarters and field levels, which will review these recommendations in June," he added.

Number five: The Plan of Action is an urgent call to unity and action. Preventing violent extremism has many dimensions, but there is nothing more urgent than the need to protect and empower our young women and men. They are victims twice over. They are lured into the ranks of violent extremists and deliberately attacked by them in parks, schools and universities, the UN Chief added. [IDN-InDepthNews – 8 April 2016]

Photo credit: UN

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

