

UNU 40th Anniversary Symposium – Summary Report

OPENING REMARKS

David M. Malone

Rector, UNU; Under-Secretary-General, United Nations

The symposium was opened by Dr. Malone. He emphasized that over the past 40 years UNU has been very fortunate to be hosted by Japan, and expressed appreciation to the Government of Japan for the funding it provides the university. He underlined the important role of young people in sustainable development, and mentioned that the students of UNU-IAS recently had the honour of meeting Their Majesties the Emperor and the Empress of Japan.

Dr. Malone noted that UNU had contributed ideas to the SDGs process, through the publication of reports and policy briefs. The process itself was complicated and involved many different stakeholders, but the central actors were the member states who negotiated the agenda. Dr. Malone observed that international organizations often overstate their role in development, which is actually achieved by developing countries driving their own progress. Outside contributions can play a very important role, however. Noting how complicated the SDGs process had been, he suggested that its best component was the public consultation, in which millions of people had participated from across the globe.

Dr. Malone observed that the SDGs do very well in articulating priority areas for progress in development, which is critical as no government can effectively prioritize all 169 targets. Local ownership can be very effective; if each government decides on a dozen (or even half a dozen) targets to prioritize, significant progress will be achieved. Dr. Malone suggested that despite the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, there were still two missing elements: successful outcomes to the Paris Climate Conference in November–December 2015, and the UN World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016.

Nobuteru Ishihara

Member of the House of Representatives; Chairman of the Federation of Tokyo Metropolitan Liberal Democratic Party Branches; former Minister of the Environment, Japan

Mr. Ishihara emphasized that UNU was the only United Nations organization to be headquartered in Japan, and expressed his respect for activities of the university over the past 40 years, and its strong leadership. He observed that since the establishment of UNU-IAS the university had been highly commended for its research and policy support activities, both in Japan and beyond. In particular, UNU-IAS had played an important role in the Tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP10) in 2010, and the establishment of the Satoyama Initiative. Mr. Ishihara also praised the activities of the UNU Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR), which has been focusing on policy-oriented research on global problems that will be of critical importance for international peace and security. He emphasised Japan's leadership in addressing global problems, and its determination to maintain these efforts over the coming 15 years. Mr. Ishihara highlighted the importance of global efforts in building sustainable societies and eradicating poverty, in which Japan and UNU should together play a leading role.

Mr. Ishihara underlined the global importance of the 2030 Agenda, and commended the symposium as a valuable forum for exchange of relevant ideas and perspectives. He expressed his hope that UNU

would be actively involved in addressing global issues and encouraging contributions by young people, and declared that Japan would maintain its generous support of UNU.

Miki Yamada

Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan

Ms. Yamada offered her congratulations to UNU and the symposium participants on the university's 40th anniversary, and expressed her confidence that its activities would continue to develop in future. She emphasized the gravity of global challenges such as terrorism and infectious diseases, and expressed her hope that UNU would play an increasingly important role in addressing these issues. Ms. Yamada observed that UNU's research had made a significant contribution to international negotiations on the 2030 Agenda. With the adoption of the new agenda, discussions within the international community are intensifying, on both political and practical challenges, such as how to develop collaboration between international organizations and national institutions, which will require creativity. Creativity and intellectual ability will be of critical importance in finding the appropriate means for implementation and an international system for monitoring. Ms. Yamada pointed out that addressing these issues would require precise analysis and bold ideas, for which the intellectual community of the world should be united. In this regard, UNU will play an increasingly important role. She recalled recent remarks by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which emphasized that the 2030 Agenda reflects many values which are strong in Japan, such as its human-centric approach. Ms. Yamada also underlined the need to include a range of stakeholders in implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including the private sector and academia.

Shigeru Douko

Parliamentary Secretary for Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

Mr. Douko emphasized that for 40 years UNU had contributed to research and policy support at the global scale, playing a vital role as a think tank of the UN system. He expressed his congratulations to Dr. Malone and the staff of the university on its 40th anniversary. Noting the challenges facing implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Mr. Douko welcomed the symposium as an important initiative in this process. He suggested that based on UNU's research areas, its findings will make valuable contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Mr. Douko affirmed that MEXT would work closely with UNU and a wide range of other stakeholders within Japan and internationally. He expressed his hope that the symposium would make a strong contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and that UNU would continue to develop even further in the coming years.

Mr. Masaaki Kobayashi

Vice-Minister for Global Environment, Ministry of Environment

Mr. Kobayashi expressed his congratulations to Dr. Malone, Prof. Takeuchi and the staff of UNU on the 40th anniversary of the university. He praised UNU's contributions to addressing environmental problems, through programmes such as Education for Sustainable Development and the Satoyama Initiative. Mr. Kobayashi highlighted the strong support that the Ministry of the Environment, Japan (MOEJ) had provided for UNU's activities to date, and expressed his hope that this partnership would be further enhanced and strengthened in future.

Recalling that under the 2030 Agenda all goals were applicable to all countries, Mr. Kobayashi underlined the need to actively involve all actors, including the private sector and citizens. He observed that of the 17 goals, at least 12 were closely related to the environment, including climate change,

sustainable consumption and production, energy and biodiversity. He indicated that MOEJ would take a lead in this process, working with diverse stakeholders and actively reviewing policy implementation and embedding the SDGs. Mr. Kobayashi mentioned the G7 Summit Meeting that Japan would host in 2016, adding that the Environment Ministers Meetings would be held in Toyama prior to the summit. He further emphasised the need for effective international cooperation, and expressed his wish that Japan would deliver messages that could lead the world. He reaffirmed the ongoing support of MOEJ for UNU's activities, and welcomed the symposium as an opportunity for interactive discussion on challenges related to the 2030 Agenda.

KEYNOTE LECTURES

Johan Rockström

Director, Stockholm Resilience Centre

In his keynote lecture Prof. Rockström explained how the concept of planetary boundaries was critical to the 2030 Agenda, and how science was showing the way forward for humanity.

He outlined three key insights from science. First, we have entered the Anthropocene, in which humans are the dominant force of change at the planetary scale — we have gone from a small world on a big plane, to a big world on a small planet. Second, the stable Holocene epoch of the past 10,000 years is the only state for the planet that we know can support humanity. Third, science shows that there are tipping points at the planetary scale, several of which we are already reaching. Together these insights underline the concept of planetary boundaries as critical to sustainable development.

Prof. Rockström introduced the new planetary boundaries model, updated in 2015, which shows that four of nine boundaries have now been crossed: climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land-system change, and altered biogeochemical cycles. These tipping points allow us to define a safe operating space for humanity, forcing us towards transformative change. A good example is the Montreal Protocol for ozone, which was developed based on science and successfully ensured we stayed within the safe operating space.

Stressing that ecosystems and climate were of equal importance, Prof. Rockström warned that by 2050 loss of biodiversity may cause a collapse in ecosystems. Oceans absorb 25% of our CO₂ emissions, and ecosystems another 25% — so the only way to address climate change is by maintaining these ecosystems.

Prof. Rockström highlighted that the 2030 Agenda was the first time political leaders had really listened to science. He commended its ambition, and the global acknowledgement it represents that sustainability is a vehicle for security, development and innovation. In concluding his lecture, Prof. Rockström stressed that the planet sets the conditions for the success of humanity. Science has shown a new path forward, in which we can have growth and success within limits, thriving within planetary boundaries.

Naoko Ishii

CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility

Ms. Ishii began her keynote lecture by noting that the concept of planetary boundaries was the backbone of GEF's strategy, and it provides a good example of how scientific progress can have an impact on policy. She emphasized that the interface between scientists and policymakers has become very important.

Ms. Ishii observed that the SDGs differ from the MDGs in several ways: the SDGs are holistic, universal, and explicitly recognize that the health of the planet is critical for the sustainability of long-term economic and social development. She suggested that this progress was due to scientific evidence, as well as extreme events which had shaken business people and leaders from their complacency. Indeed, Ms. Ishii drew attention to recent quotes from high-profile global figures on how continued environmental degradation is putting long-term economic and social development at risk. She highlighted three major trends underpinning this call for environmental sustainability: (i) the increase in the global population, (ii) the burgeoning middle class, and (iii) rapid urbanization.

Ms. Ishii emphasized that achieving the SDGs would require transformation of three key systems of the economy: cities, food production, and energy. She discussed opportunities for each of these systems, and introduced relevant GEF activities. By 2050, 2.5 billion additional people will be living in cities, and there are opportunities for transformation by strengthening strategic planning and developing integrated public transport systems. Global food production must increase 70% by 2050, requiring investment in agricultural research to increase productivity and resilience. Energy systems must be transformed by pricing carbon, expanding renewable energy and improving energy efficiency.

Considering the challenge of financing, Ms. Ishii highlighted the need to create an enabling environment for mobilizing domestic resources, both public and private. She discussed catalytic financing, pointing out that international interventions can reduce project risks, and support aggregation.

In conclusion, Ms. Ishii emphasized that achieving the SDGs will require a major transformation in our key economic systems, supported by changes in policies and regulations, and financed by large-scale redirection of global investment flows. Most importantly, it will require the broadest possible "coalition of the willing", through new multi-stakeholder approaches to bring together communities, corporations and countries.

PANEL DISCUSSION

The panel discussion opened with acknowledgement of the planetary boundaries concept as extremely important for sustainable development. Short presentations by three of the panelists were followed by open discussion with the audience.

Hironori Hamanaka

Chair, Board of Directors, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies

Prof. Hamanaka underlined the importance of governance for implementing the SDGs. Drawing from a recent IGES report, he suggested that for many developing countries a lack of well-funded institutions could stall progress in the early stages of implementation, and the international community should

devote more resources to build skills for meeting these fundamental requirements. For many of the SDGs, countries will need to implement governance arrangements that combine top-down and bottom-up approaches. Prof. Hamanaka emphasized that the private sector would be a critical actor, and that an important role would be played by government decision-makers in key sectors.

Miki Sugimura

Vice-President for International Exchange and Professor, Sophia University

Prof. Sugimura focused on education, emphasizing that it would play an essential role for the SDGs, as it had for the MDGs. She suggested that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) could connect people from diverse cultures and disciplines. In this regard, the academic community can contribute to the implementation of the SDGs not only by providing evidence-based inputs but also by serving as part of a multi-stakeholder platform. She pointed out that internationalization of higher education was very relevant, and could provide cultural connectivity for the SDGs by bringing together young leaders from different countries. She underlined the importance of having a solid platform for international higher education, as provided by UNU, as well as the ASEAN international student programme at Sophia University.

Prof. Sugimura observed that cooperation between academic institutions within and around Japan would also be of critical importance, and expressed her wish for the academic community to contribute by engaging in various platforms. Sophia University has a curriculum on human development, in which scholars from various disciplines are cooperating to provide students with valuable experience of field work and active learning so that they can develop comprehensive understanding. She pointed out that UNU would be able to contribute in this regard by providing a prototype of such a platform, and expressed her willingness to further enhance the cooperation between UNU and her university.

Masayo Hasegawa

Project General Manager, Environmental Affairs Division, Toyota Motor Corporation; Member, Future Earth Engagement Committee

Considering the role of the private sector in implementing the 2030 Agenda, Ms. Hasegawa underlined that companies were aware of the SDGs but they lacked the necessary tools. She drew upon the example of the SDG Compass, developed by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) to guide companies on how they can align their strategies and measures and manage their contributions to the SDGs. Ms. Hasegawa emphasized that putting the SDGs at the heart of a company would provide benefits in identifying business opportunities, strengthening stakeholder relations and keeping pace with policy developments, as well as stabilizing societies and markets. She underlined that businesses had a stake in society, and that the transition to a more sustainable world was a major business opportunity.

Discussion

The discussion began by addressing the role of science in implementing the SDGs, and the need to strengthen its links with policy. Prof. Rockström noted that Future Earth was a particularly valuable initiative, as a new type of science is needed to address the huge risks facing the world, and that Japan would play a central role as one of the leading global hubs.

The panel also considered the differences between the MDGs and SDGs processes. Ms. Ishii emphasized that the universality of the SDGs was the greatest improvement. She suggested that involving a broader range of stakeholders would help to bridge the gap between the global North and global South, and that building an effective platform for multi-stakeholder engagement, in which they could share their experiences and develop a common way of thinking, would be the starting point. She suggested taking an issue-by-issue approach in such a forum, which would ensure transparency and credibility. The same could be said about monitoring methods and processes, while the involved actors should develop a shared understanding about the “price on nature”.

In response to questions from audience members, the panel addressed the relative responsibilities of developed and developing countries. Prof. Rockström suggested that thanks to the largest ever shift in social and economic development this whole agenda was becoming obsolete, and that gaps would be within nations rather than between nations. Although the ethical dilemma of differentiated responsibility will remain, every country is committed to decarbonization, and beginning to gain from it. Prof. Hamanaka suggested that new mechanisms were needed to strengthen transparency and accountability for climate change measures taken by countries, and that the key question would be how information submitted by countries was reviewed.

Ms. Ishii observed the high level of collaboration at the national and local level, and that catalyzing such cooperation was the most realistic and actionable way of achieving progress. She emphasized that middle-income countries had started to take more responsibility, pointing out that the GEF donor countries that had increased their contributions recently were Brazil, China, India and Mexico.

Prof. Sugimura added that education would have a supportive function in setting a common agenda, and promoting inclusiveness as a key concept. She added that equity must be considered, with quality education secured for all. She stressed that the academic community should contribute by creating a platform for younger people with diverse backgrounds to study together and develop their own viewpoints, transcending national interests. Stressing the need to translate the global targets of the SDGs into different countries and regions, Ms. Hasegawa indicated that the Future Earth Engagement Committee had established a Knowledge Action Network, which was taking up the SDGs as a topic. She also introduced the pledge-and-review experience of the Keidanren (Japan Business Federation), in which they set their own goals and reviewed them, and set more ambitious goals once the initial ones were achieved. She pointed out that further discussion was needed at the regional and national levels to determine the actual implementation processes for the SDGs, and the specific roles of each stakeholder. Concluding the panel discussion and the symposium, Prof. Takeuchi underlined that development and environmental protection should be regarded as compatible rather than mutually exclusive, and that mainstreaming this idea within the business community and international society would be of critical importance for the successful implementation of the SDGs. He also stressed the need to ensure that the SDGs were clearly set out as societal goals of Japan. He affirmed in this regard that UNU would continue to raise awareness of the SDGs and related issues in Japan and beyond.