

Rt Hon Helen Clark:

Keynote Speech to

Research for Development Impact Conference

“Partnering for Impact on Sustainable Development”

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University of Sydney

Many thanks for inviting me to address this very important gathering of development researchers, practitioners, and evaluators.

The conference theme is ‘partnering for impact on sustainable development: collaboration, co-ordination and solidarity’. Let me offer some observations based on many years of pushing sustainability at home in New Zealand, and then during these past eight years, as UNDP Administrator and Chair of the UN Development Group, supporting the development and implementation of the global agendas.

I will comment on partnerships in two senses:

1. On the partnerships needed between North and South, South and South, within governments, and with actors across economies and societies;
2. On the partnerships needed across the silos in the international co-operation world – from humanitarian activity to development and peacebuilding initiatives.

My working assumption is that if each actor across all these kinds of partnerships focused on what could be achieved by working together - rather than by each working in their own silo - progress could be accelerated on implementing the global agendas and on meeting national development goals. It goes without saying that there is more than enough work for

all of us, the issue is how to maximize impact with the resources available? That requires a willingness to work together and to co-ordinate closely.

(1) It's almost a cliché to say that very big partnerships are required to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, together with the other big agendas of 2015 – the Paris Climate Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda for Financing for Development. Add to those last year's New Urban Agenda promulgated at Habitat III in Quito, Ecuador, and the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016.

These agendas are all interlinked, largely cross referenced, and very ambitious. They require massive investments – UNCTAD (the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) estimated in 2014 that to achieve the SDGs in key sectors by 2030, annual investments made in developing countries would need to total US\$3.3 to \$4.5 trillion per annum. They suggested that the funding gap was \$2.5 trillion per annum, and that public funding would not be sufficient to bridge it.

Partnerships, however, are not just about money, important as that is. They are also about solidarity, the exchange of knowledge and best practice, and support for the acquisition of technology and building the capacity to innovate.

At their best, partnerships for development must be fully inclusive. Development cannot be about planning from on high without regard to the views and perspectives of those whom policies and programmes aspire to reach. Women want gender-sensitive development. Youth want to be engaged. Older people have views on how their needs should be met. Rural dwellers want infrastructure and services to reach them. LGBTI want their rights upheld. Indigenous people want their status fully acknowledged and respected. Refugees and migrants and others who tend to be marginalised want full inclusion. The list could go on.

Then, partnerships must be built at many levels:

(a) The traditional North-South partnerships based on Official Development Assistance remain very important – especially for Least Developed Countries, Low Income Countries overall, Small Island Developing States, and countries experiencing crises of various kinds.

(b) South-South Co-operation is growing fast – although in grant form it remains dwarfed by traditional ODA. But intra-South trade and investment is very significant, as is the development and spread of technology and best practice within the South.

On this score, China's *Belt and Road* initiative stands out as one of the largest and boldest development initiatives launched in recent times from either North or South. It comes as a number of traditional development partners are prioritizing domestic investments and/or budget consolidation over more expansive visions of what lifting living standards universally could mean - both for those still living in extreme poverty or vulnerable to it, and for the longer-term prosperity of today's developed countries.

The challenge for Belt and Road will be for it to be about more than the physical infrastructure of rail and road corridors and ports and airports. To contribute to the new global agendas, it must incorporate a vision and initiatives for human development and build in sustainability as a core principle.

(c) The private sector's role in financing development will grow, as the public purse simply cannot meet all the funding needs. But there needs to be a consistent focus on the catalytic role of public funding in developing the institutions, capacities, and enabling environments which will drive inclusive and sustainable growth. Support for that is badly needed in many jurisdictions – without those institutions, capacities, and enabling environments, countries will struggle to attract the investment they need.

In the era of the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement, for example, the design of public policy and regulation to steer investment towards sustainability is vital. Phasing out fossil fuel subsidies and making renewable energy investment attractive are good examples of what is required. Support for building the capacity to put such frameworks in place and uphold them is catalytic.

So is support for the establishment and consolidation of the rule of law. This is not only a good thing in its own right, but also with respect to economies as it gives people greater confidence in the future of their investments, from those of the smallest farmer and micro-entrepreneur to those of the major productive or infrastructure sector investor.

(d) With good enabling environments in place, the private sector can play a very constructive role through quality investment in inclusive and sustainable growth, and in fighting climate change. It has been encouraging to see broad partnerships forming around

major objectives like stopping deforestation. In the New York Declaration on Forests, signed up to by dozens of parties at the UN Secretary-General's Climate Summit in September 2014, governments, leading companies, indigenous people and local communities, and NGOs and civil society organisations agreed on goals to halve the rate of deforestation by 2020 and end it by 2030.

Particular commitments were made for the palm oil sector, but the ambition is to go further to incorporate soy, beef, and other commodities in this agenda. New funding mechanisms are being set up to support the move to zero deforestation. It is very powerful when government regulators, international partners, big buyers, large and small producers, and the indigenous people who are the traditional guardians of the forests combine their efforts.

(e) Overall, development co-operation partnerships should be seeking to strengthen national capacities for development. I often said at UNDP that we must aim over time to put ourselves out of business because the job was done. In the process of reaching that point, we must all continually adapt the ways in which we work. We need to be highly context specific – the partnerships sought by fragile states, for example, are very different from those sought by Upper Middle-Income Countries.

So, as countries move along the spectrum of development, we must all adjust our offerings to be relevant as partners. It is a tribute to UNDP's capacity to adapt that it has retained a universal presence in developing countries at national request – and often with significant national funding - to support countries to meet the remaining, the new, and the emerging development challenges they face.

(f) Partnerships must be forged within the governments of both developed and developing countries. Sustainable development can't be achieved without "whole of government" thinking and action. It requires us to move away from old patterns of development which sacrificed the environment in the pursuit of economic growth, and often widened social inequality as well.

That approach stores up problems for the future – indeed we could say that it has contributed to producing the highly unequal world with an environment in peril which we have today. Our world has to change, or leave a toxic legacy for those who come after us. To continue the way in which development has occurred in the past is irresponsible.

Effecting this shift within government requires leadership at the highest level. In many countries rich and poor, presidents and prime ministers are leading from the front in setting up mechanisms to drive Agenda 2030. Many countries are lining up to present their progress reports at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development each July in New York. They will want to be able to show results across the wide-ranging SDGs. Thus, powerful ministries like that of finance need to be engaged with the SDG agenda, and the ministries which interact with the economic sectors – like those for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, industry, and tourism - need to be on board. Social and environment ministries can't carry the human and sustainable development agendas forward on their own. There needs to be policy coherence across governments, and at the different levels of government. Sub-national governments have a big role to play too – often they have significant planning, funding, and service provision roles impacting on whether development is sustainable or not.

(g) New ways of working must be fully inclusive of civil society, and respect its roles of advocacy and representation. Civil society, media, and parliaments should be able to hold governments to account for the commitments they have made to the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, and other global agendas. They need access to information and the capacity to analyse it, and they must be free to report what they see.

(h) What of the role of the multilateral system in the big partnerships required? My years at UNDP tell me that it and its sister agencies in the UN system have been able to gain the trust of the very wide range of developing countries. Their governments, and other national partners, look to the UN agencies to support them to mainstream the global agendas into their strategies, policies, plans, and budgets, and to help build national capacity for implementation, monitoring, and reporting.

The UN's *convening power* is considerable too, and it is often called on within countries to facilitate dialogue between state and society on both global and national agendas, and to advocate for implementation of global commitments. It has a critical role in enabling partnerships for sustainable development.

(i) The specific role of the international and the regional financial institutions is well worth mentioning, as they have significant resources which can be deployed in support of both the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. There was a time when the agendas developed at the UN were not given high priority by them. Indeed, UNICEF's advocacy of "adjustment with

a human face” in the 1980s and UNDP’s adoption and promotion of the human development paradigm from 1990 were alternatives to the structural adjustment approaches promoted by the IFIs. The Human Development Index was designed to be a broader measure of progress than the use of GDP per capita alone as an indicator can be.

Now we see the strategies of the IFIs and the RFI’s being aligned with both the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. Their investments can support the “*billions to trillions*” leap required for implementation. I am particularly impressed by the focused “*High Five*” priorities of the African Development Bank which seek to accelerate Africa’s transformation and are SDG-consistent. But for the IFIs and RFI’s to be a major force for sustainable development, they too will need greater policy coherence across their different wings, in particular in enabling the fiscal space which developing countries need to invest in their people, even when times are tough.

(2) Let me turn now to a second dimension of partnerships: how humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors work together for peace and for risk-informed and resilient development.

This is the subject of much discussion at the UN – resulting variously in the “New Ways of Working’ signed at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul last year; the Sustaining Peace agenda backed by resolutions of both the UN Security Council and the General Assembly last year, and the conflict prevention agenda of the new UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres.

We need big picture thinking here – the peace needed for sustainable development will not be the product of early warning systems to spot tensions, nor of the dispatch of mediators or peacekeepers. Rather, enduring peace will be the outcome of long term developmental processes – including of governance capacities.

It is surely no accident that many of the states which lapse into deadly conflict these days have high levels of poverty and/or an inequitable distribution of wealth; governance which is neither inclusive nor responsive and does not reach all corners of the land; and an absence of the rule of law. Such development deficits cannot be addressed over night, but addressed they must be if Agenda 2030 is to have any hope of succeeding.

Our world is currently witness to long running conflicts which are largely responsible for the forced displacement of 65 million people, send economies and human development into reverse, and in the worst cases produce near or actual famine conditions. Take Yemen, for example, where famine threatens – not because of drought, but because of a devastating conflict.

The UN peace and security architecture has proved unable to address these conflicts effectively – either because of polarisation on the Security Council preventing decisive action being taken, or because the tools at the Council’s disposal when decisions are made to deploy peacekeepers are simply insufficient to keep the peace where deep divisions within countries remain.

In the absence of progress towards peace, the UN’s humanitarian and development actors and their many partners have had to rethink outdated responses, which had often assumed a “relief first, development later” approach, and instead endeavour to work contemporaneously. For Syria and its neighbourhood, for example, the UN system has for several years launched combined appeals for funding for relief and resilience-building. Development actors have complemented humanitarian activity there through support for livelihoods, provision of basic services, infrastructure repair, and in Syria itself through debris removal from bombed sites. In the neighbouring countries, efforts have been made to support host communities under pressure, and to work with municipalities to maintain an atmosphere of tolerance towards refugees. Similar approaches have been employed in Yemen and Libya.

These approaches were developed as it became apparent that the conflicts could rage for years. But “new ways of working” also need to bring us together to support countries to build much greater resilience to shocks of all kinds – whether they be the breakdown of political processes and social cohesion leading to conflict, or the shocks of severe climate-related or seismic events, or global economic turbulence.

It’s always better to build a fence at the top of the cliff than to position the ambulance at the bottom. Over time that will be a cost-effective investment, and in the best-case scenario could lead to a significant proportion of the ODA which now must go to life-saving relief being available to support sustained development.

For me, partnerships for resilient and risk-informed development should include:

- Support for national leadership and ownership. No amount of partner intervention can ever substitute for that. A commitment to building national capacities is vital.
- Acting to reduce inequalities significantly, as the 2030 Agenda urges us to do, and to build tolerance between peoples. The aim should be to strengthen social cohesion to reduce the risk of tensions boiling over into conflict.
- That needs to be matched by support for building governance which is inclusive and responsive, allows for civic space, and helps develop the institutions and capacities needed to prevent descent into conflict. Civil society and local leaders have big roles to play in this. It has been impressive, for example, to see the roles played by women, youth, and local leaders in supporting peaceful electoral processes in a range of countries.
- Diversifying economies. The one or two commodity economy is highly vulnerable to a range of shocks. Investments in skills and infrastructure, having a positive enabling environment for investment in new sectors, and developing climate-resilient livelihoods are critical.
- Disaster risk reduction – most expenditure related to disasters comes in the form of humanitarian relief after the event. Investments need to be made up front in risk-informed development - from planning where people should live and work and where infrastructure should go, to the design of early warning systems, and rapid response capacity. After a shock has been experienced, there needs to be a commitment to “building back better” to stop history repeating itself time and time again.

The truth is – there will be shocks – there always have been. The issue is how we plan and mitigate around them, and what steps we take to mitigate those which can be prevented.

In conclusion

Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement in full would enable our world to make major strides towards greater peace, prosperity, and sustainability.

This is a time for solidarity, and not for nations to turn inwards. We face challenges that no one nation, sector, or organisation can address effectively on its own.

The power of partnerships is that we each assume responsibility for action – and contribute according to our means and capacities to get results.

The global agendas can't be realised without developed countries embracing them as relevant to their future. Sustainable development is not something which happens to someone else somewhere else. It is a collective challenge which requires a collective response. We need developed countries stepping up, not stepping away from sustainable development.

Since the groundbreaking agreements of 2015 were reached, there have been some political changes at national government level which are not positive for their implementation. Nonetheless, I believe the agendas have momentum – precisely because they came about as the result of broad consultation and input. While some governments press the “hold” button, other key actors in their society at sub-national level and in the civil society and corporate sectors are committed to staying the course. Maintaining partnerships across all these sectors will be essential for realising the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement.

End of speech.