

**Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator on
“Linking Poverty Eradication, Equity, and Environmental
Sustainability in the Post-2015 Global Development Agenda”**

**Post-2015 Environmental Sustainability Thematic
Consultation Leadership Meeting Opening Plenary**

18 March 2013, 9:00am

San José, Costa Rica

**I am very pleased to address this leadership meeting of the
post-2015 environmental sustainability thematic
consultations.**

**My thanks go to the Governments of Costa Rica and France
for co-hosting this important meeting, to UNEP for co-
chairing, and to all UNDP’s other partners in this endeavor.**

**Our hope is that this leadership consultation will help ensure
that environmental sustainability is fully reflected in the
Post-2015 agenda.**

Traditional development patterns have pushed our planet towards its natural boundaries. Environmental sustainability is essential for safeguarding the world's ecosystems and for building a peaceful and equitable world.

Costa Rica, itself is well known for pursuing environmentally sustainable approaches to development. Through its ecotourism, reforestation, an innovative system of payments for environmental services, and its drive to rely 100 per cent on renewable sources of energy, Costa Rica has been putting the green economy into practice in ways which benefit people and the environment. The world has much to learn from Costa Rica and others who share its commitment to sustainable development.

Today's meeting is an important part of the UN's initiative to engage citizens and leaders from all walks of life in the

development of a post-2015 global development agenda. An unprecedented number of consultations are being held – including up to 100 at the national level, eleven global thematic consultations like this one, and global interaction through social media.

The issues for the consultation here in Costa Rica are both difficult and urgent. The UN’s member states acknowledged at Rio+20 last year that advancing human development and protecting the planet’s ecosystems must be approached as two sides of the same coin.

The Rio + 20 outcome document called for sustainable development goals (SDGs) which are “coherent with and integrated into the UN Development Agenda beyond 2015”.

In my remarks today, I will comment on some of the lessons learned from the MDG experience, including on the

importance of integrated approaches to sustainable development, and emphasize the importance of both national and global ownership of the post-2015 development agenda.

Some lesson learned from the MDGs

In signing the Millennium Declaration in 2000, heads of delegation from 189 countries – including me as Prime Minister of New Zealand at the time - agreed to an ambitious vision for the new millennium to advance human rights, development, and peace.

The MDGs were then launched as a pathway towards that vision. By offering measurable and time bound goals, targets, and indicators, they sought to convert the principles and ambitions of the Millennium Declaration into action and progress.

The MDGs provided a unifying vision for development. Their clarity, conciseness, and measurability brought diverse actors together around a common cause.

As a result there, has been significant progress on many of the indicators targeted by the MDGs – including on poverty reduction, access to improved water sources, and enrolment in primary school. But there are areas where the targets are far from being reached, including on a number of the indicators in MDG 7 on environmental sustainability.

Now, as the post2015 agenda is debated we need frank assessments of what made some MDGs and their targets work well, and not others.

On MDG 7 considerable progress has been made on the drinking water target. As well, over 98 per cent of ozone depleting substances have been phased out, and the coverage

of protected areas has been expanded. But we cannot be happy with the:

- **continuing biodiversity loss and the rate of deforestation,**
- **slow progress on expansion of marine protected areas,**
- **failure to curb greenhouse gas emissions, and**
- **shockingly slow progress on improving sanitation.**

Unfortunately there has not always been sufficient political will to address these vital issues. Environmental protection is often seen as an obstacle to economic growth. Yet economic growth which strips out the planet's ecosystems is not sustainable. Modeling for UNDP's Human Development Reports is showing that environmental degradation deepens inequity. If unchecked it will slow further advances in human development to a crawl – and even see a regression for the world's poorest people.

Take for example, the unsustainable use of natural resources in Malawi, where it is estimated, by a government study, that the resulting annual loss is equivalent to 5.3 per cent of GDP. That is greater than the amount of funding allocated to the education and health sector in Malawi's 2009 budget. The same study also suggests that a greater focus on reducing soil erosion could have lifted more than 1.8 million people out of poverty between 2005 and 2015 – thereby bringing the country closer to reaching its poverty reduction targets.

At UNDP we believe it is critical to link the poverty eradication, social equity, and environmental sustainability agendas together – as was so clearly emphasized in the outcome of the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development last year. The world will not be able to sustain economic and social progress if the environment is wrecked.

We need the integrated approaches to sustainable development which Rio + 20 endorsed put into place.

The imperative now is to move from a discourse focused on trade-offs between growth, poverty, and environment, to one which looks at how to advance the three strands of sustainable development together.

At UNDP we call this the “triple win” approach. We see it being put into practice in a range of countries, rich, middle income, and poor, which are determined to develop, but wish to do so in a way which sustains our world for future generations.

From this environmental sustainability consultation to date, a majority of contributors have emphasized the importance of seeing environmental sustainability in a multi-dimensional context, highlighting the linkages with social issues as wide

ranging as youth, employment, gender, equality and empowerment, education, human rights, and poverty reduction.

Going forward, the challenges at the national level will be to promote:

- coherence across national, regional, and local levels of government,**
- integrated decision making for sustainable development across policy silos,**
- inclusive processes to shape national vision and approaches to sustainable development, and**

At the global level a set of goals and targets for sustainable development which can be measured and easily communicated can help guide action around the globe.

In the consultations held to date, a range of ideas and perspectives about the design of an integrated sustainable development agenda have been heard.

To integrate the goals of poverty eradication and sustainable development, for example, it has been suggested that human development targets might be coupled with targets for the sustainable management of natural resources.

That could mean, for example:

- **including a target on expanding access to energy, alongside a target for energy efficiency;**
- **matching targets for food security and nutrition with targets for sustainable food production and reducing food waste; and**

- **including targets on access to improved sources of water alongside targets for limiting and ideally eradicating contamination of water.**

An approach along these lines would acknowledge both human development objectives and the natural limits of the planet.

Others have called for dedicated global goals to curb biodiversity loss; end the degradation of oceans, fresh water sources, and land; address climate change; and build more sustainable cities.

In the sister thematic consultation on inequality, it is acknowledged that addressing environmental degradation is linked to tackling inequality. The world's poorest populations depend the most on the natural environment for their livelihoods, health, and security, and are the people

most negatively impacted by its degradation. Some have suggested that this could be captured in the post-2015 agenda by tying targets on ecosystem services to employment or livelihoods-related targets – thereby encouraging decent work and the protection of ecosystems at the same time.

These are just some of the pertinent issues which I hope you will discuss over the next couple of days.

The importance of global and national ownership of a new development agenda

The success of a post-2015 development agenda will depend on its ability to rally international support and commitment to action.

A strong message coming out of the UN-led consultations to date is the importance of participatory, inclusive, and bottom-up processes in designing the agenda.

The actions needed to move our world onto a sustainable path will require commitments from governments, the private sector, and civil society alike.

In the words of President Chinchilla of Costa Rica: “As global citizens, we need to face the future together ... there are no passengers in this planet; we are all crew members”.

The UN-led consultations on a renewed global development agenda beyond 2015 are being held to ensure that a wide range of stakeholders from around the world are heard as members states deliberate on the future agenda. Thank you for being a part of this process. We hope you will stay engaged as the new agenda takes shape through to 2015.

My concluding thought for today is that environmental sustainability cannot be a mere add on to a new global development agenda – or stand alone in a vertical silo.

The relative lack of success on MDG 7 relates in no small part to the failure to make clear links between ecosystem integrity, poverty eradication, and equity. Given the priority so often given to economic growth, one has to assume that if decision-makers thought growth was being threatened by environmental degradation, they would take greater care to assess its environmental impacts. We need to build joined-up thinking for sustainable development into the next global agenda as Rio + 20 has inspired us to do. That means deepening the conversations between environment and development actors about – as the Rio + 20 process put it – “the future we want”.

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