2019 Incheon Communiqué

SUMMARY OF THE 2019 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TRANSFORMATION FORUM

24 OCTOBER, 2019

1. The sixth annual Sustainable Development Transformation (previously Transition) Forum, hosted by the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development of UNDESA, welcomed 140 representatives and experts from national and local governments, the United Nations system, policy think tanks, academic institutions, the media and civil society from around the world in Incheon, Republic of Korea, from 22 - 24 October 2019.
2. Participants discussed challenges and approaches to accelerating progress towards sustainable development including making the necessary transformative changes to how policies are made, economies are organized, production and consumption take place, our countries and our organizations are governed and how societies cooperate with each other. Business as usual is no longer possible and genuinely sustainable new models of development must be found.
3. In the spirit of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the international community, governments and all actors remain committed to ending poverty in the coming decade, permanently leaving no one behind, and achieving shared prosperity, while securing a stable climate and a healthy planet for present and future generations.
4. ***Asia-Pacific Launch of 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR)***. The Forum saw Asia-Pacific launch of the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report, *The Future is Now - Science for Achieving Sustainable Development*. The participants welcomed the presentation and joined a moderated discussion of the report by the co-authors present from the Independent Group of Scientists. All the participants greatly enriched the conversation around the report with their fresh perspectives.
5. The GSDR contains a scientists' call to action based on their research, as well as a framework for action organized around six entry points to the social and economic challenges to be overcome in order to implement the SDGs, and four levers for transformation to enable those hurdles to be surmounted. The Forum explored how to make the transformative changes in the systems identified by the report: the energy system, the food and agricultural system, as well as sustainable and just economies. The Forum focused on the levers of governance, individual and collective action, financing and science and technology.
6. ***From incremental change to transformation.*** A key challenge identified by the scientists and in the discussions was how to move from incremental societal progress to transformative change. The international community has committed to achieving a hugely ambitious sustainable development agenda by 2030. However, the science tells us that this decade is the last window for getting to grips with global climate change if there is to be better-than-even chance of not exceeding the Paris Agreement temperature target.
7. ***'Thinking the unthinkable'.*** The Forum benefited from a presentation of the ***Thinking the Unthinkable Project***, an effort to influence policy makers towards a new way of approaching political and societal problems in the face of new challenges from social movements.
8. ***Making the seemingly impossible possible: political leadership and will.*** The presentation noted that, while leaders and societies recognize that business as usual is not an option, change does come easily, especially big changes like those needed. In planning ahead, adaptive governance capacity will be crucial, and governments, policy makers, businesses and others must be willing to 'think outside the box' to find solutions, to innovate across all walks of life, all the system entry points in all circumstances.
9. ***'Making siloes dance', addressing trade-offs and capitalizing on synergies.*** The 2030 Agenda and SDGs are an integrated agenda and set of goals. The 2019 GSDR elucidates the synergies and the trade-offs across the Agenda, providing a useful guide to governments and others in capitalizing on those synergies (between climate action and health, for example) but also in

overcoming trade-offs (for instance, near-term tension between making a swift transition away from fossil fuels and ensuring continued affordable and reliable energy access, as well as other prerequisites for human well-being).

10. ***Bringing everyone along with the needed transformations.*** The international community and national governments are grappling with the need to move from the 'what to' to the 'how to' of implementing the 2030 Agenda. Change can bring winners, as well as losers and, if governments are to have the trust of people who may face the loss of jobs or reduced living standards, it will be important to reaffirm the commitment in the Agenda to "leave no one behind". This calls for inclusive dialogue on how to realize a 'just and fair transition', to tap the knowledge, not just of experts, but of ordinary people.
11. ***Strengthening effective, inclusive and adaptive governance at all levels.*** Countries have different histories, cultures, institutions and legal frameworks, all of which contribute to different styles of governance. Effective governance combines continuity and change – i.e., keeping the lights on and bringing light where there was none, while shifting the type of bulb and, in due course, the source of power. Whatever the governance style, governments need to deliver the goods, be accountable to their citizens and lead by example. In the face of major transformations, they must also be able to adapt, and to foster the innovations which make their societies resilient and adaptable to change.
12. ***Changing the way societies consume and produce.*** Among the biggest challenges to transformation is 'loss aversion', particularly of wealthy societies and consumers, who find the task of internalizing the external costs of unsustainable consumption patterns burdensome. What can change this status quo to bring about the large-scale changes required? Fiscal and other policies, incentives have an important role to play, but it is hard to imagine changes at scale without a fundamental change in values. Education, including sustainability and moral education, has a crucial role to play, including educational and awareness raising campaigns.
13. ***Education is crucial to adaptive capacity and learning.*** Korea's successful economic transformation certainly owes much to investments in education. Education of the population raises productivity, civic engagement and appreciation of the importance of science to sustainable development. Education imparts knowledge but also inculcates the values that can facilitate the behavioral changes required for transformation.
14. ***Learning from a rich diversity of experiences.*** Most countries that participated in the Forum have had the opportunity to report on their early experience with implementing the SDGs to the international community through their Voluntary National Reviews presented to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Those presentations provided a valuable opportunity for peer learning.
15. This SDTF has offered a further opportunity to share and learn from each other's experiences. There have, of course, been failures and shortcomings in all countries and organizations but there are also success stories, good practices – pockets, if not swathes, of excellence on which to build and from which others can learn.
16. ***Gaining greater leverage to move the world.*** Political will is primordial to achieving the 2030 Agenda, but it will also take finance and constantly improving science and technology -- closing financing gaps and the digital divide -- and transformative partnerships that can target and work to overcome the main obstacles to progress. Coalitions for transformative change need to be built or strengthened, with concrete, time-bound deliverables, adequate resources, and shared responsibility among all the partners.
17. ***2030 is Now.*** Participants in the 2019 SDTF left with a renewed sense of urgency to work within and across our siloes, with multiple stakeholders, towards positive and transformative change for sustainable development for all.