

## HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2019

### SIDE EVENT: STATE OF THE SDGs

#### PROGRESS ON THE 2030 AGENDA: INSIGHTS FROM COUNTRY EXPERIENCES

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### TALKING POINTS

#### INTRODUCTION

Is there a distinctive contribution that voices from the South can bring to public debate? An interesting proposition.

I congratulate the organisers of this event, Southern Voices and UN Foundation, for raising this question. Not only here today. It is the very *raison d'être* of the international community. The objective should not be only to raise the question but to bring those voices in a clear and coherent manner to the discussion to inform policy choices.

I am vice president of the World Leadership Alliance - Club de Madrid, a network of over 100 former heads of state and heads of government, from every continent, a significant number from the South, who came into office through a democratic process. I think I speak on behalf of all of us when I recognise the work of Southern Voices and we look forward to continuing co-operation with you.

#### SHARING DISTINCTIVE VOICES

Do the “Global South” have a distinctive voice?

I start with the assumption that all of us have a unique voice. Each of us has our own experience and therefore a distinctive perspective which we can add to the common understanding.

But too often voices at the centre drown out voices from the periphery.

Even words like “centre” and “periphery” have connotations of rank and hierarchy. We need to challenge and overcome such assumptions.

We also need to overcome the assumption that we get from our education and media that encourages us to think exclusively in certain terms of the knowledge and expertise that traditionally resides in Western countries perspective.

We are experts in what it is like to live in our own community. And we are expert in knowing what our community needs even if we may not necessarily be experts in how to meet those needs.

#### **A DISTINCTIVE SOUTHERN VOICE?**

Now let me look more closely at the proposition that those of us from the global south have an important contribution to make to global debate.

First we cannot claim exceptionalism. We have good and bad experiences to share and of course we can learn a lot from bad experiences – things we should not repeat.

We have had and still have good and bad leaders: good and bad policies. I have been involved in regional efforts to manage the tragedy unfolding in Venezuela, and we are learning a lot from that experience.

The global North destroyed much of its precious natural resources in the first industrialisation while part of our virgin resources remained intact. Now much of them are under threat, to feed the demands of the current wave of globalisation. Much of this demand comes from the north and we bear the costs but get no benefit - apart from the middle men and rent seekers. We need to raise awareness of this resource exploitation.

But we also have positive messages.

We have untold numbers of activists experimenting with new approaches to community development and sustainability, often following traditional cultural principles and practices.

In my own country we have prioritised investment in education and health, and we are well known as being one of the few countries without an army. So we are wealthy not only in a material sense but we have an informed, aware and confident youth who are contributing to the wealth of our nation by respecting and conserving its natural resources – for the benefit not just of Costa Ricans but the world as a whole.

Also, we can find new approaches from the South that are becoming global good practices.

For example, the Club de Madrid has been involved in Nepal in recent years supporting national efforts on the implementation of SDGs. The Government of Nepal has adopted important normative frameworks for minorities and women's rights. These commitments are now enshrined in the recently approved Constitution. Furthermore, women's representation in the Constituent Assembly dramatically increased from 2.9 per cent in 1991 to 32 per cent in the 2017 elections.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union's latest ranking of the percentage of women in parliament from January 2019 onwards stated that in the top 10th position, 9 out of 10 are countries from the Global South: Rwanda, Bolivia, Mexico, Costa Rica and Namibia among others.

Costa Rica held the 8th global position with women accounting for 45% of parliament.

We have good news stories to share from the South.

In the Global South we understand very directly the impact, often negative of global trends and global policy at regional, national and local levels, especially in rural and indigenous communities.

I was privileged to co-chair a working group that the WLA-CdM convened to look at the link between Shared Societies and Environmental Sustainability. We brought together a wide range of experts from the North and the South – environmentalists, economists, political leaders, representatives of national governments and inter-governmental bodies and, not least, representatives of indigenous communities and community activists.

We looked at why sensible warnings from local communities are often ignored.

We saw that the pressures within the current socio-economic system encourage actions which are inimical to public welfare and the future of the planet.

Profit is often the determining factor and those most concerned to see a good return on their investment are far removed from those most negatively affected.

The time frame is also short term. The time frame of companies is the next share holders meeting. The time frame of governments is the next election.

Negative consequences are treated as externalities which someone else will have to deal with. For corporations that means the government. For governments that means the next administration.

But the people in those communities cannot distance themselves from the impact of policies.

How are we to find ways to gain attention for these experiences and insights.

### SHARED SOCIETIES PROJECT AND AGENDA 2030

The Members of the Club de Madrid recognize that a core element in achieving democracy is social inclusion and inclusive institutions, or as we say a Shared Society. More than ten years ago the Members recognised that the issue of social exclusion was one of the most important conversations that needed to be happening. And it is very relevant to the topics we are discussing today.

Inclusion for the Project and in Agenda 2030 goes beyond the commitment, as expressed in the Goals, that *“no one should be left behind”* and also means that all sectors of society and all groups are able to participate in all aspects of the policy process, including needs assessment, policy formulation and implementation.

The SDGs clearly offer the opportunity to achieve social progress and Shared Societies, given the synergies I have already noted. The following 3 suggestions are relevant to a number of the questions posed:

- **Participation:** Most states and some development organisations seem to be continuing with a top down approach to the delivery of services in pursuit of the SDGs. Governments are focusing their energy on creating institutional frameworks in order to provide services for the people. Laudable as that is, the Shared Societies Concept shows that this is not sufficient. All stakeholders need to be involved in identifying the gaps that need to be filled and developing approaches that will fill those gaps. They know best the challenges facing their communities.

Progress on the SDGs will come by working with the people, and not just for the people.

- **Transparency:** As is generally recognised, it is difficult to achieve effective participation without appropriate knowledge and information. Therefore, transparency is important. It is also important in relation to the National Voluntary Review Process.
- **Paradigm shift:** Agenda 2030 both requires and advocates for a paradigm shift if we are to ensure that no one is left behind and we realise the future we want for all. Our present systems at national and global level are not able to meet the requirements of Agenda 2030. This shift requires a new balance on multilateralism and a new balance on the North-South engagement.

### REDRESSING THE BALANCE

We need space. We need to be able to try different approaches and share the lessons from those experiences.

In this era of globalization, different countries and organizations are increasingly interdependent. This entails new forms of engagement and innovative multilateral collaboration, and process to create 2030 Agenda is a prime example.

Applicable to rich and poor nations alike, the SDGs provide a framework for collective action that highlights the interdependence of development priorities, countries, and people.

National government ownership must go beyond global development agencies and architecture. High-level political will is critical, in both North and South countries, as the success of the SDGs depends on the ability of governments to foster institutional collaboration and create ownership across institutions, both domestic and global. Getting there requires leadership from the top.

Tackling the complexity and ambition of the 2030 Agenda requires integrated approaches that engage external stakeholders and also to shifting the balance.

Individual countries often find it difficult to encourage Shared Societies because the international trade and financial systems make it difficult to introduce policies conducive to that.

So we brought together people from the different intergovernmental institutions, including the UN, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and we quickly drew up and

agenda of things that need to be done at the national and international level to ensure a more balanced relationship between the Global North and the Global South. It is simply an outline and a template showing what could be done. If you find it of interest, we, at the Club de Madrid, would be happy to work with you to develop it further.

Before finish, I would like to take the opportunity to talk about the woman who named this room, a Honduran environmental activist killed in 2016. Berta Caceres' efforts to speak out about the rights of minorities, is part of her legacy today. A voice from the "periphery" that has become an inspiring voice not only for the South, but for the Global Community.

I hope I have stimulated our discussion today and this may stimulate real change for the future of all our societies.

Thank you