

How can countries implement and monitor sustainable development goals (SDGS)
Side Event organized by Hungary, Viet-Nam and the Asia Europe Foundation

Opening remarks

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Good afternoon Colleagues, Under-Secretary General Wu Hongbo, President Zhang Yan and fellow panelists, representatives of Member States and non-governmental organizations.

I'm very happy to welcome you here in this full room, which is a feat in itself, considering that there are G77 and EU coordinations going on, and also, some other side events. I think it speaks to the importance of this meeting. I will try to keep my comments brief in order to save time.

The first message is that we are convinced that we are not jumping the gun. There is now high time to talk about implementation, about how Countries can get ready for the next phase. Indeed, there are important milestones being reached. We can talk about the Open Working Group's report on the goals and targets; the Addis-Ababa summit that successfully concluded just a couple days ago; we have 65 days before the New York Summit; we are at the final leg of negotiations in the IGN. In December, we will have the Climate Change Summit in Paris. Since we will discuss it today, I just want to highlight the importance of the decision that we will have to take regard to the indicator set in next March; and then, we will have the first true implementation conference, the HABITAT conference.

The issue of implementation has always been with us. During the Open Working Group process, that Hungary was co-chairing with Kenya we have been pestering you with the principle of SMART goals and SMART targets, meaning "specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely". It was always about implementation, because in order to be meaningful, this agenda will not only have to be comprehensive and transformative, but it has to become implementable.

However, it is important to emphasize that we are now entering into a new phase. We are almost done with the truly international phase, where we decide, what we would like to do in the next 15 years and also give some ideas with regard to, how we want to achieve those goals in the framework. Then, in the next phase, when it comes to implementation, – as President Zhang has said –, we are talking about the primary responsibility of the countries. This is a completely new ballgame. The often emphasized policy space for all countries becomes important, and also the so-called national ownership of the process.

What we have to understand regarding implementation, is that it needs a paradigm change. First of all, it's not only because it's transformative, what we are trying to achieve but also it is universal for the first time in the world's history. It speaks to 193 countries. All of the Countries, including the developed ones will have to do their "national homework" in order to achieve the results that we are aiming for.

Secondly, implementation is not only about countries, but about all stakeholders pooling the resources and pulling into one direction. We have repeatedly said that "old money" will not be enough to achieve this transformative agenda and that the "do it sustainably" principle will have to be true to all stakeholders – governments, financing institutions, the private sector, volunteers, NGOs, etc. This is possibly the biggest undertaking that we will have to do in the next 15 years. Of course, it has relevance at state level, at regional level and also at the international level.

Coming to the state level, since we are talking about national implementation today, I just want to emphasize the MDGs' lessons learned. It is very clear, that the countries, that have fared the best, achieved the most, had very strong national implementation plans. Usually those countries that have involved stakeholders, others than governments, also achieved better results. So when we talk about stakeholders' involvement and ownership, this is not a slogan. This is one of the recipes for good outcome.

Then of course, the MDGs have been comprehensive enough, but it cannot be compared to the SDG agenda that is integrated, interrelated and comprehensive. This gives you the other important message: You cannot cherry-pick – or you can, to your own detriment. If you will have a national implementation plan that speaks to all three pillars of sustainable development you will have a better possibility for success. How it can be achieved? President Zhang had mentioned some of the important elements. In many of the countries, what we see is some kind of a gearing up for the decision-making process that will end up in national implementation plans. Also the 'fit for purpose' exercise that we see in some of the countries with regard to decision making, implementation, review and monitoring. Hopefully, these are the issues that we can hear about today, based on the two country perspectives, namely Viet-Nam and Poland.

Then as to the last phase of today's discussion – which is also close to our heart – the importance of statistics and indicators in this process. You remember that the Rio +20 Outcome Document, in point 251, gave us the very clear mandate to come up with goals, targets and indicators. So please, don't forget that indicators are very important part of this process. And please don't forget that indicators will be a driving force for all national implementation plans – as we had seen it in the case of the MDGs.

The last point: October 20th will be the Second World Statistics Day. The GA resolution on the World Statistic Day has been promulgated by Hungary with the support of 97 co-sponsors, for which we are very thankful. We do believe that this will be one of the best events for the statistical community to come together in all the countries and at the regional level, to talk about what would be their role in the next 15 years. With that I wish us a very good discussion.

Thank you very much.