

Opportunities and Challenges of the Sustainable Development Goals

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The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were unanimously adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, have gradually taken root in civil society and the business community at the national and international levels.

While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focused on development assistance to developing countries, the SDGs bring an expanded scope that encompasses disparities within developed countries, leaving no-one left behind and aiming to realize “the future we want”. The SDGs provide a just cause for the 21st century, and cannot be accused of lacking an ambitious aspiration for an ideal world. I would contend, however, that the SDGs prioritize the pursuit of material benefits without addressing spiritual wealth and peace of mind. Nevertheless, I should probably regard some of the terms used in the text of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as promoting the pursuit of non-material benefits, such as “well-being” (which is also prominent in SDG 3), and “respect for cultural diversity”.

Furthermore, while the MDGs set realistic targets based on the past track record, the SDGs embody idealistic goals such as “end poverty in all its forms everywhere”. This is why efforts to achieve the SDGs by 2030 are expected to face considerable challenges ahead, as are those focused on the Paris Agreement on climate change that was also adopted in 2015.

Taking this into account, a key element for success is action by businesses. Leading companies have taken the initiative ahead of civil society, with the publication of the SDG Compass by the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), which was established prior to the MDGs, together with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). In April 2017, SDSN Japan organized an SDG Dialogue event on “Global Companies and the 2030 Agenda” in Tokyo, bringing together nearly 300 participants.

Reflecting the origins of the concept of sustainable development in the environmental arena, half of the participants at the event from private companies worked in CSR departments, while the others were in corporate management, for example corporate strategic planning offices. The SDGs are clearly going to play a key role in the business arena, as a common language for the conduct of global business, as a set of non-financial information to be disclosed for ESG (environmental, social and governance) investment, and as a checklist for corporate risk management. I hope that actions to achieve the SDGs will not be taken as charitable costs, but rather mainstreamed into corporate management as investments in the future. I believe the time has come for companies — as entities with indefinite lifespans, unlike those of human beings — to consider the future of the planet in all of their operations.

Let me add that I am committed to contributing towards the important mission of SDSN Japan to enhance human well-being through comprehensive and sustainable development of the environment, economy and society.

Building towards sustainable multi-stakeholder partnerships

On 28 March 2017, UNESCAP and UNU-IAS co-organized a workshop on multi-stakeholder partnerships for the SDGs implementation in Bangkok during the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) 2017. Bringing together representatives from governments of East Asian countries, academia, civil society, business and international organizations, the workshop discussed ways to build effective multi-stakeholder partnerships toward achieving the SDGs in the Asia and the Pacific region.

<http://sdsnjapan.org/en/workshop-multi-stakeholder-partnerships-in-asia-and-the-pacific/>



SDG Dialogue Explores the Role of Corporations in Realizing the Global Goals

SDSN Japan and UNU-IAS co-organized an SDG Dialogue event on “Global Companies and the 2030 Agenda” on 20 April 2017. Given the recent drastic social and political change in the international community, the event explored how global companies can contribute to mainstreaming the SDGs, considering new modes of corporate management in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Representatives of Unilever, Toyota, Aeon, Global Compact Network Japan, Government Pension Investment Fund (GPIF) and CDP shared their views and experiences at the event.

<http://sdsnjapan.org/en/sdg-dialogue-global-companies-and-the-2030-agenda/>

