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A shared vision

The Sustainable Development Goals and the new agreement on climate action are two separate intergovernmental processes, but they share a universal aspiration. Governments must approach both in an integrated and coherent manner

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Poverty, inequalities, justice, conflicts, natural disasters, vulnerability, displacement. The complex situation in northern Nigeria; the severe droughts in São Paulo, in the Horn of Africa and in the Sahel; the existential threat to many small island developing states posed by sea-level rise due to climate change. These problems and challenges are interconnected and

have multiple root causes. They demand universal, integrated and responsive solutions.

This is why 2015 offers such an extraordinary opportunity to address the root causes of the complex and interlinked challenges humanity is facing: ending poverty and reducing inequalities, sustainable development and tackling climate change. In the words of the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon: “We are the first generation that can end poverty and the last that can avert the worst impacts of

climate change.” It is for this reason that we are calling 2015 ‘the year of global action for people and planet’.

In January, I had the opportunity of participating in the World Economic Forum Annual Meetings. When we were discussing these challenges and the opportunities of 2015, a CEO asked me why the UN was

▲ A priest conducts a commemoration ceremony at a mass grave for Typhoon Haiyan victims in Tacloban city, central Philippines. Investment in risk-reduction measures and climate adaptation would greatly reduce vulnerability to these type of extreme climate events

promoting two different and competing agendas in a world of scarce resources: climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Reflecting on this observation, we might indeed be inadvertently giving the sense that the UN is promoting two parallel agendas, because there are two separate intergovernmental negotiating processes rather than the one agenda. We need to explain much better how and why sustainable development for poverty eradication and tackling climate

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change are one universal aspiration. There is no possible doubt. Both agendas have the same overarching objectives for people and planet, for present and for future generations: to eradicate poverty in all its dimensions, and achieve sustainable development.

Indeed, eradicating poverty and curbing climate change are both enablers and outcomes of sustainable development. There are multiple wins between the post-2015 development agenda and climate action. With the appropriate means of implementation and with the fulfilment of the international commitments for development and climate financing in time – and this is an important prerequisite – there will be no trade-offs. It is a win-win game.

Multiple synergies

But why are climate action and the post-2015 development agenda two sides of the same coin? The proposed SDGs incorporate a specific goal on climate change (SDG 13): “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” (referring to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as the primary negotiating forum). Being so essential for the credibility of



the whole SDG framework, the synergies between climate action and sustainable development go far beyond SDG 13.

There are major synergies on four levels at least.

First and foremost, for people – and especially for the poor – policies and actions for adaptation, resilience, ensuring secure and sustainable access to basic needs and natural resources (water, food, energy), the fulfilment of human rights, and increasing economic opportunities for the future to build sustainable and climate-resilient livelihoods are the same, whether they

▲ Graffiti by Brazilian artist Paulo Ito highlights the severe water shortages in São Paulo, Brazil's drought-hit megacity of 20 million inhabitants

are called ‘SDGs’ or ‘climate action’.

The consequences of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013 demonstrate the interlinkages of sustainable development and climate change, especially in light of the increasing intensity and impacts of natural disasters. The death toll of more than 10,000 people could have been lessened substantially with more robust and efficient risk-reduction measures and climate-



adaption funding, which involve the same methods and motivations as those necessary to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. These preparatory actions, therefore, must be integrative in nature to address climate action through sustainable practices and policies. Moreover, many of the policy decisions and investments that impact directly on people's lives, on resilience and on climate change, are made at the sub-national level and led by local authorities. This is why sustainable rural-urban systems and cities and local authorities have such a key role to play.

Second, all the key areas of climate action are reflected in concrete SDGs and targets. The New Climate Economy report, by the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, identifies three core areas for better growth and climate outcomes: landscapes and land use; sustainable cities; and sustainable energy. Looking at the proposed SDG framework, we see a close correspondence.

The SDG of ending poverty in all its forms incorporates building the resilience of the poor and vulnerable. This is an essential principle of climate justice. The SDG on food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture includes a specific target on sustainable and resilient food and agriculture systems. Ensuring universal access to reliable and modern sources of energy incorporates targets on renewable energy and efficiency. Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable is a core SDG. The SDGs on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, on resilient and sustainable infrastructure, on sustainable consumption and production, land degradation and land use, all incorporate in their design and targets resilience and mitigation drivers.

Third, there are important synergies from the financing perspective. For people, and also for companies, local authorities or ministers of finance, many of the policies and projects at the local and country level that will deliver on the SDGs are the same as those delivering on climate change. The SDGs can be seen as the investment pipeline on core priority issues, which also include the essential areas for tackling climate change.

As the New Climate Economy report underscores, the bulk of the investments that are being accounted for as the 'huge needs' of the sustainable development and climate agendas will be made in any case: around \$89 trillion will be invested in infrastructures between 2015 and 2030. The additional cost of making such investments low carbon is only \$266 billion a year. The challenge is to make these investments deliver sustainable development. The post-2015 and climate agreements provide a unique occasion for setting up the right

incentives and transforming regulatory frameworks for converting financial needs into investment opportunities.

Last but not least, with the new climate agreement entering into force in 2020, major action on key sectors for mitigation and adaptation on the aforementioned SDGs will already be starting, as the implementation of the SDGs begins five years before full application of the climate agreement.

A framework for implementation

An integrated development agenda demands an equally synergistic financial framework. This is why governments should work to better align the financing frameworks that developed out of two major strands of development debate – the Monterrey and the Rio processes – in the upcoming Addis Conference in July 2015. We must do our best to avoid sending out the message that the climate and development agendas compete for financial resources.

It is essential to ensure that financing sustainable development, technologies and capacity development are harnessed and – especially – made available to those in need, within a more enabling international environment. International commitments on official development assistance and climate finance must be honoured. This is also an issue of climate justice.

While recognising the different nature of the development and climate agreements, we must approach the negotiations in an integrated and coherent manner, including the discussions on financing. It is of paramount importance that governments engage in the negotiations with internal coherence, a shared approach and with a common position. Ministers of finance, of planning, economy and development, of the environment and climate change, of social policies, of trade and of foreign affairs must come together with an integrated common vision.

We need both a transformational, non-legally binding agenda with SDGs, and a universal meaningful agreement for climate change. Sustainable development and poverty eradication will not be possible in the absence of either of the two. ●