

For much of my professional life I have been involved in one way or another in promoting and communicating globally-agreed development goals related to sustainability, human rights and the elimination of poverty – the three-in-one symbiotic trinity that must become reality if we as a human race are to rise to our full potential as a species.

As you know, the Sustainable Development Goals are but the latest articulation of a process that began with decolonization in the early 1960s. At the opening of the United Nations development decade, we began to understand the real aims of development and the nature of the development process. We learned that development concerns not only material needs of people, but also the improvement of the social conditions of their life and their broad human aspirations. Development was now seen not just as economic growth, it as growth plus change.

In the second development decade of the 1970s these concepts were further developed. The ILO, for example, put forth an employment-oriented development strategy in its World Employment Programme. Within this second decade also came the first major milestone in the sustainable development trajectory, The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (also known as the Stockholm Conference), which for the first time linked environmental sustainability with human well being.

The Third Development Decade of the 1980s brought a re-examination of themes that emerged from earlier conferences. The Declaration on the Right to Development positioned the concept of development within the human rights framework – that human development was not just a good thing to do – it was the right thing to do. And as Martin Luther King once said, it is always the right time, to do the right thing.

Following the 1983 World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, a 1987 report named 'Our Common Future' was published, defined Sustainable Development as: 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'

Fast forward a decade and we find ourselves in Rio de Janeiro for the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development – or more simply termed, *The Earth Summit*. This is where my own life began to intertwine with the process. I was in Rio on behalf of the Los Angeles based magazine Earth News, where I was the editor in chief. My book, *The Earth Summit: A Planetary Reckoning*, summarized the event and the process leading up to it, through the eyes of civil society, business, indigenous people, politicians and youth.

Many of you may remember the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, as well as the annual Sustainable Development Commission held in New York under the auspices of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs – known as DESA to its friends. As the work of Agenda 21 subsided beyond the horizons of our imaginations, we moved on to the Millennium Development Goals, and from there in 2015 to the Sustainable Development Goals – which are but the latest attempt to address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice.

While I could talk to you all day about the SDGs I only have ten minutes here and so will focus on numbers 4, 5, 16 and 17.

Goal 4 looks at achieving universal quality education: Since 2000, there has been enormous progress in achieving the target of universal primary education. The total enrolment rate in developing regions reached 91 percent in 2015, and the worldwide number of children out of school has dropped by almost half. There has also been a dramatic increase in literacy rates, and many more girls are in school than ever before. But we cannot rest on our laurels here – there is still a lot of work to be done.

Goal 5 is my favourite, as I believe we will never solve 100% of the world's problems and challenges until we empower 100% of the people. Leaving 50% of humanity behind in any country undermines all of us, everywhere. Achieving gender equality by 2030 will require urgent action to eliminate the many root causes of discrimination that still curtail women's rights in private and public spheres. For example, discriminatory laws need to change and legislation adopted to proactively advance equality. Yet 49 countries still lack laws protecting women from domestic violence, while 39 bar equal inheritance rights for daughters and sons. Eliminating gender-based violence is a priority, given that this is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world today. Based on data from 87 countries, 1 in 5 women and girls under the age of 50 will have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner within the last 12 months. Harmful practices, such as child marriage, steal the childhood of 15 million girls under age 18 every year.

Sustainable Development Goal #16 brings us closer to home, or rather to the subject of this important meeting of the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation -- Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels – all necessary conditions for the achievement of the proceeding 15 goals from poverty and education to climate issues and the protection of the environment. You don't need me to remind you that advances in ending violence, promoting the rule of law, strengthening institutions and increasing access to justice are uneven and continue to deprive millions of people of their security, rights and opportunities and are undermining the delivery of public services and broader economic development.

So what can be done to bridge the achievement gap in these and other of the SDGs? That brings us to Goal #17, partnerships, working together – especially greater collaboration among international organizations to promote and encourage the adoption of appropriate policy frameworks that are conducive to the achievement of all 17 SDGs – evidence-based best practice policy frameworks that empower civil society, protect human rights, encourage the growth of a rules-based private sector, and promote principles of participation, accountability and non-discrimination in a fully democratic and participatory environment.

The SDGs will only be realized through strong global partnerships and cooperation –by supporting national plans to achieve all the targets, while encouraging greater collaboration among the UN agencies, funds and programmes, the EU, the regional banks and important organizations like the OSCE. Improved collaboration and coordination will require better and more open communication on important and often taboo topics like human rights.

I thank you for your time, for your attention, and for the opportunity to share these thoughts today. I wish you the best in your deliberations, and in your individual and collective efforts to advance these issues in this important forum.