

**“Development cooperation:
lever for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda”**

**Development Cooperation Forum
5TH Biennial High-Level Meeting**

Mary Robinson Keynote Remarks

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In 2015, we witnessed scenes of jubilation as world leaders listened to the calls of their peoples and adopted two ambitious frameworks to set the world on course for a safer and more prosperous future for all. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, in conjunction with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, offer the global community our best opportunity yet to avoid catastrophic climate change, end poverty and enable all people to live lives of dignity, underpinned by human rights.

But we would be remiss to get carried away with the celebrations. In 2015 we took the first step. There remains a challenging road ahead to realise the vision set out by the 2015 agreements – and this has implications for development cooperation. Not all of the ways of working employed now will be effective in the context of this new universal development agenda. Likewise the institutions

and funding mechanisms will need to be refreshed and reformed to be fit for purpose in this new era of development.

These changes to the world of development cooperation are what prompted the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD to form a High Level Panel to make proposals and recommendations to re-shape the committee for the post 2015 era. I am honoured to be chairing the Panel, and this event provides an opportunity for me to interact with so many of you that work in the field of development cooperation. What is certain is that development cooperation will play a critical role in delivering the commitments made last year and in particular in ensuring that no one is left behind.

Individually, the successful implementation of either the Paris Agreement or the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development would represent a triumph of multilateral cooperation on a scale unprecedented in human history. Yet we must undertake both simultaneously and if we falter in our progress on one track we will fail in both.

Without climate action on the scale required to realise the goal set out in the Paris Agreement – *to hold global average temperature to well below 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels* – development gains will be eroded or even reversed. More carbon pollution means more climate risks which pose threats to food production, health, human security and human rights. Uncontrolled climate change is incompatible with the eradication of poverty.

Climate action will be part of education, healthcare, agriculture and water management. It is essential to the achievement of all 17 SDGs. The SDGs themselves are critical to near term climate action as they are being implemented between now and 2030, a critical window for climate action, and they cover all aspects of the economy and society.

In my capacity as Special Envoy of the UN SG on El Niño and Climate, I have seen the way that the impacts of EL Nino are already aggravated by climate change, and affect severely poor countries that have little responsibility for the emissions causing climate change. On a recent visit to Ethiopia I urged that this issue could no longer be looked at through a humanitarian lens alone. It requires an integrated approach including disaster risk reduction, insurance, climate smart agriculture, food and

nutrition security and gender informing the humanitarian and development actions. The objective is to improve the resilience of affected communities to withstand ever greater threats.

It is important that actors in development cooperation realise the degree to which the 2015 agreements move us away from business-as-usual. No country has achieved sustainable development. That is why the new agenda is universal. Achieving the SDGs will require a wholesale shift in how countries develop and cooperate.

The road ahead is undoubtedly complex. But development practitioners and policy makers have addressed complex issues before with success –the global response to HIV and AIDs led by UNAIDS for example, or the progress made through the Montreal Protocol to protect the Ozone layer. On the other hand where in the past, the global community has overlooked complexity – reducing or simplifying globally interconnected issues to fit into siloed responses, the problems persist. For example, we have yet to solve the global hunger crisis – perhaps because of the challenge of addressing the many inter-connected causes of food and nutrition insecurity ranging from the absence of human rights to climate change. So to meet SDG 2 to end hunger we will also need to make progress on related goals such

as on water, sustainable consumption and production, climate change and gender equality. This is the new integrated approach that is at the heart of the SDGs.

This type of integrated approach is also at the core of climate justice, which links human rights and development to achieve a human-centred approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its impacts equitably and fairly. Climate justice is informed by science, responds to science and acknowledges the need for equitable stewardship of the world's resources.

Development cooperation can support the implementation of the Paris Agreement and SDGs, while advancing climate justice, by having clear priorities. Firstly, development cooperation providers must recognise the unprecedented opportunity the Paris Agreement and the SDGs provide to shape a more equitable and just world. Secondly, human rights and gender equality must underpin the implementation of both agreements; and thirdly, development cooperation must focus on reaching the furthest behind first and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Let us consider first the opportunities development cooperation has to shape a better future for humanity. While the MDGs contributed to a significant reduction in extreme poverty, inequality continues to grow. 70% of people live in countries where economic inequality has increased in the last 30 years. Agenda 2030 give us a fresh opportunity to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment and reduce inequality. The universal nature of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement requires that *all* countries participate in action to deliver sustainable development. Industrial countries must take this agenda seriously at the domestic level.

While this transition to sustainable development is a challenge for all countries, countries at lower levels of development face the greater challenge. They are being asked to do something that has never been done before – to develop and lift their people out of poverty without fossil fuels. This is a different prospect to merely reducing emissions and requires the absolute support of the international community. No country has developed without fossil fuels to date – so cooperation is key to providing the technology, finance, skills and systems to create an alternative way of developing.

It may seem contradictory – but to be fair all countries must be enabled to participate in the transition away from fossil fuels together and at the same time. If not we will exceed the carbon

budget and consign countries without the means to participate in the transition to renewable energy, to a future based on expensive, obsolete and polluting fossil fuels. So creating the conditions, legal, regulatory, financial and political, for all countries to be part of the solution is key. This is where climate finance, and finance for sustainable development, can play a role in catalysing the transition which in turn needs to shift the trillions of dollars of investment worldwide to power the transformation.

The security of future generations the world over is completely dependent on supporting a just transition to zero carbon and zero poverty today. We require unprecedented multilateral cooperation - all countries and citizens must act together motivated by enlightened self-interest and human solidarity for a better future.

The second key point relates to the need for a just transition, underpinned by human rights and gender equality. The transition to sustainable development will have a positive impact on poverty eradication and the quality of people's lives, if the policies and actions taken are informed by and consistent with human rights norms and gender equality. What we cannot and should not do is set human rights obligations aside in the rush to combat climate

change and promote sustainable development. Actors in the fields of development cooperation and climate change must never lose sight of the fact that climate change is about people, and our responses to it must be fair and people-centred.

As the impacts of climate change increase, the temptation may be to jettison rights obligations in favour of rapid responses. This would be to ignore the complexity of sustainable development solutions – embracing strategies that are good for the planet but disregarding harm they may cause to the lives of those most vulnerable. For example, it is generally accepted that the diversion of corn production to ethanol for biofuels was a significant contributor to global food price increases during 2007-2008. This led to heightened food insecurity with the worst effects on poor and vulnerable people. These scenarios can be avoided by integrating human rights into climate action from the outset to minimise the risk of negative impacts on people’s lives and their rights.

I am hearing complaints about human rights violations by some of those wanting to provide clean energy – because they go for large projects that disregard land rights of poor communities.

The Paris Agreement reminds countries to respect and promote human rights and gender equality when taking action to address climate change. Likewise Agenda 2030 is grounded in a commitment to human rights and realises that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets. The time has come to genuinely place gender equality and human rights at the heart of development cooperation.

The third point is the commitment contained in the preamble of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to “reach the furthest behind first”. This requires actors in the field of development cooperation to use their expertise and experience to design solutions that target the poorest people and communities that are beyond the reach of traditional development approaches and market mechanisms. For example, in tackling energy poverty, we know that an approach focused solely on increasing production capacity, rather than on delivering energy as a service that powers development, will result in the most vulnerable people being left behind.

The first target of Sustainable Development Goal 7 on renewable energy reads:

“By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services”

This is a very ambitious target, and one I wholeheartedly endorse. But I would like to highlight a worrying discrepancy between that target and the current outlook of the International Energy Agency. The IEA's latest Africa Energy Outlook forecasts that, by 2040, more than half a billion people in Africa will still not have access to electricity.

Again, this points to a complex challenge. In order to realise universal access to sustainable energy by 2030, the global community must understand the barriers to energy access for the poorest and most marginalised people. Tackling energy poverty is not simply about the ambitious expansion of electricity capacity. Countries must pioneer innovative solutions that deliver energy services to poor people. This is what it means to reach the furthest behind first.

We need to leverage mechanisms that are already reaching the poorest people. One such strategy may be to deliver sustainable energy services through social protection. Typically, the beneficiaries of social protection mechanisms include the chronically poor and those who are economically vulnerable. They also constitute a significant proportion of those who currently have no access to electricity. Therefore countries with existing social protection systems have already identified the

people whose energy needs are greatest, and have the infrastructure and delivery mechanisms in place to reach them in a targeted way.

To achieve zero carbon globally by 2050, which is what is needed for the 1.5°C temperature goal and to avoid dangerous climate change, every sector of the economy will have to play a role. This is undeniably complex – but if we recognise that sustainable development solutions are climate solutions, and that in designing climate change responses we have an opportunity to eradicate extreme poverty, ensure access to clean energy for all and realise the right to development for all – we can forge a path to a new and successful era of development cooperation.

The 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement are transformative in a true sense, and can only be implemented if we are ready to be transformative in action.