

High-Level Exchange Forum
Localizing the 2030 Agenda: Building on What Works

Opening remarks by Mehrnaz Mostafavi

27 October 2019
Banjul, The Gambia

Excellencies,
Distinguished representatives,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to speak to you on such an august occasion, grounded in a spirit of optimism for the future of West Africa, and blessed with the majesty of this beautiful setting. I'm tremendously grateful to the Government of The Gambia and all our partners this evening for their commitment to this Forum.

This initiative would not have been possible without the rich engagement of the governments and people of the eight countries, as well as the international partners, so well represented here this evening.

In a world where individuals in every corner of the globe seek to fulfil their aspirations for peace and prosperity, we are reminded of the importance of “we the people” to live free from fear, want and indignity.

These are the clarion calls of human security.

Anchored in the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063, this groundbreaking Forum provides a unique opportunity to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and the application of human security.

With their focus on people, they place the local at the center of multi-stakeholder engagement. They compel us to look at the resources and assets within communities. And, they require us to listen to, invest in, and engage with people so as to build the foundations upon which societies can flourish.

To this end, I call upon all of us to push beyond the familiar and expand our partnerships to find tangible solutions that connect our respective know-how and resources and build on the ingenuity and promise of people here and in all corners of the world.

Let the smiling coast of West Africa be the start of our collective journey in this endeavor.

I thank you for your attention.

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Introductory remarks by Mehrnaz Mostafavi

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Allow me to begin by expressing my gratitude to the Government of The Gambia, the Senegalo-Gambian Permanent Secretariat, the UN Resident Coordinator and Country Team in The Gambia, and the International Peace Institute for their partnership in organizing this groundbreaking Forum.

I'm also most grateful to all of you who have traveled from across the West African subregion, as well as other parts of the globe, to be with us over the next two days to engage in dialogue and collective exploration on how we can accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals by putting the local at the center of our multi-stakeholder partnerships in the eight countries so well represented here today.

Partnering on this initiative on localizing the 2030 Agenda in West Africa was a natural extension for us at the Human Security Unit.

For more than 15 years, the UN Trust Fund for Human Security has been advancing inclusive and participatory frameworks to ensure that the essential concerns of human security – that is, the survival, livelihood, and dignity of all people – are central to our efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Well-suited to the multifaceted challenges faced by communities and governments, from persistent poverty, to natural disasters, climate change, conflict, displacement, and other vulnerabilities, human security highlights the interconnectivity of current and emerging challenges and their impact on people's lives and well-being.

As such, human security underscores the importance of comprehensive and multi-sectoral solutions that engage a broad range of stakeholders, including local actors, by combining their respective expertise, knowledge and capacities, and by building synergies for collective action towards sustainable development.

A focus on human security thus allows for our efforts to be firmly grounded in the local context; celebrating and drawing upon the leadership, innovations and initiatives that are transforming communities, driving social and economic progress, and ensuring that no one is left behind.

This enables all actors to better prioritize their responses by building on opportunities that limit risks and help progress towards sustainable development.

Such cooperation can lay the groundwork for developing strategies that transcend short-term gains and transform societies to meet people's hopes for prosperity, peace, and life lived in dignity.

At the Human Security Unit we stand ready to mobilize resources and support the development of operational programmes that will move us from dialogue to action, building on the outcomes of this Forum, with the aim to scale-up successful local initiatives towards advancing national progress on the implementation of the SDGs.

I'm honored to be with you today. I believe we have all the necessary ingredients in this room to break new ground and I look forward to the insights and recommendations that will emerge through our collaboration over the next two days.

Thank you.