The Economic and Social Council

Topic A: Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) and Culture for Sustainable Development

“Culture is what we are. It is the wellspring of collective imagination, meaning and belonging. It is also a source of identity and cohesion at a time of change.”

~ UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova

The 1992 Earth Summit brought about the first globally collective thought on the issue of sustainable development, and the idea has become pervasive in development planning ever since. The report published in 1987, known as Our Common Future, states that “there has been a growing realization in national governments and multilateral institutions that it is impossible to separate economic development issues from environment issues; many forms of development erode the environmental resources upon which they must be based, and environmental degradation can undermine economic development.” Sustainable development refers to living and developing for now, with a strong awareness and care taken for the future. These issues are arguably some of the most interconnected issues our world is facing in the 21st Century. Cooperation between political authorities, international organizations, relevant industries, and communities are all vital to the success of the MDG’s and the integration of STI.

One goal laid out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on September 8, 2000, recognizes the “Responsibility for managing worldwide economic and social development.” As the international community continues to uphold the Millennium Development Goals, the importance of Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) has become increasingly clear regarding international development. The gap between the underdeveloped and developed countries continues to grow. Further, it is evident that developing countries represent the scale of production necessary to render the next technology transition economically feasible. The need for sustainable development in the developing world is great. With the exporting of values and technology from the developed world, many countries on the importing side of this equation find their traditions, values, or economic realities threatened by proposed solutions to problems concerning sustainable development and its socio-economic contingencies.


Background

Our Common Future and the Division for Sustainable Development

The idea of sustainable solutions was first realized and introduced to the international community through the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future. The report published in 1987 focused on the interconnected nature of nations, and how globalization required a necessary co-dependency. Unsurprisingly, this report covered a variety of issues which are necessary to the discussion of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty in general. The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, became the active talking ground for Our Common Future, and fostered the budding discussion of sustainability. Out of this conference, the Commission on Sustainable Development was formed to liaise in the international community for the encouragement of sustainable solutions and concepts. Currently known as the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD), it has five primary functions and responsibilities. The DSD provides the following: “(1) Support to UN intergovernmental processes on sustainable development; (2) Analysis and policy development; (3) Capacity development at the country level; (4) Inter-agency coordination; and (5) Knowledge management, communication and outreach.”

The Millennium Summit and the Creation of the Millennium Development Goals

With the passing of A/Res/53/202 in 1998, the decision to host a Millennium Summit, which resulted in the Millennium Declaration and subsequent MDGs, was made, and the focus of the international community has been channeled towards these landmark goals ever since. From the beginning of the efforts in 2000 to present, much progress has been made towards the attainment of these goals, with whole and partial goals being met at both the national and international levels. As promising as these achievements are, advancements in other areas have been lacking. The United Nation Development Programme Millennium Project, which tracks data and produces annual reports at the international, regional, and national levels on progress towards the MDGs, consistently indicates that there lacks enough data on MDG 8, the goal with a specific target on access to information technologies. MDG 8.6 recognizes the need for new information and communication technologies through partnerships with the private sector. The lack of sufficient data remains the key concern surrounding MDG 8 and its targets, as the international community remains unable to know whether or not progress has been made in this area.


World Summit 2005

The High Level Plenary Meeting of the 60th Session of the General Assembly, or the World Summit of 2005, was the first official follow-up meeting of its magnitude since the Millennium Summit in 2000. On the discussion agenda, alongside the issue of how to best redouble efforts towards meeting the MDGs, were the issues of international security and human rights. The World Summit called for a stronger push at the national level to develop plans that would allow each country to claim ownership over its development agenda, making it more likely to achieve the MDGs. The goal was set for 2006 for each Member States to have its own national development strategy in place. Many “quick impact” solutions to barriers to MDG progress were also recommended. The outcome document from the World Summit stressed a broader context of development when discussing matter of social, economic, and political themes, with the underlying theme of sustained economic development as the key to meeting the MDGs.

Working Towards The Future We Want: Rio +20

In June of 2012 began the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the making of the sustainable development goals were set in motion. Member States agreed that to further encourage sustainable development, a mechanism for developing a funding strategy through the General Assembly. This conference also adopted a framework of programs to stretch the span of ten years, regarding the topic of consumption and production patterns, with the goal of reducing waste and becoming more sustainable as whole. The concept of a “green economy” was a focus as well, calling for standards in green economy policy to be formed with strict adherence to international law, and with respect for each Member States’ individual strengths and weaknesses as far as natural resources were concerned.

The outcome document, The Future We Want, proved to be a holistic address of the world’s current environmental state as well as any other facet of sustainable development. It is also the foundation for what the new sustainable development goals would encompass. The main points being: the goals stay consistent with international law, the principles set forth in

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7 Ibid

8 Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit. [http://www.who.int/hiv/universalaccess2010/worldsummit.pdf](http://www.who.int/hiv/universalaccess2010/worldsummit.pdf)


Agenda 21 as well as the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation remain at the forefront, and the goals be in addition to the MDGs, including issues related to access to information and communication technologies, as outlined in MDG 8.

**Progress in the International Community**

The Earth Summit became the first of three conferences to evaluate and discuss sustainable development, and the issues, which most heavily influence the topic such as science, technology, energy, conflict resolution, and poverty to name only a few. The sheer number and broad range of topics continues to show the importance of sustainable solutions. The *Synthesis of National Reports for Rio+20*, sheds encouraging light on an increase in investment in sustainability and commitment to the development of institutions, think tanks, and international development programs. Whereas in the early 1990’s, sustainable development was rarely considered, such is not the case today. As the international community looks forward at the current issues and future needs as they relate to STI and sustainable development, there has been significant progress and promise of working towards a more sustainable world.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development records at least 310 official policies, initiatives, and institutions to promote green movements around the world. These are recognized and praised by the United Nations as instrumental to the international community and the goals of the United Nations. Some are recognized as early as the mid-1970’s by the United Nations, and include regional, national, local, and global practices and initiatives. Many of these initiatives are fundamental United Nations organizations, declarations, and conventions. The international community is growing in its concern and attention given to the important topic of the STI and sustainable development.

**Current Issues**

*The Millennium Development Goals a Decade Later*

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When writing the Millennium Development Goals, sustainability became a fundamental key to addressing the topic of development. MDGs 7 and 8 give attention to environmental sustainability and the importance of international partnership in development. The installation of these targets has spurred the implementation of multiple programs and efforts. Regarding MDG 7, these include but are not limited to the restoration of environmental resources, a reduction in the loss of biodiversity, and improvement in the lives of “slum dwellers”. Also, regarding MDG 8, steps have been taken to address the needs of isolated communities, providing affordable drugs to developing countries, and increasing the availability of technologies and communications, to name a few. While there have been many important and encouraging steps taken in the last 15 years towards these ends, there remains a gap in the realization of the goals. The concept of the “digital divide,” where developing countries develop new technologies at a much slower pace than developed countries, which further accentuates the differences in development status, remains a key barrier in the realization of MDG 8, Target 1. The United Nations reports a general increase in assistance to developing countries, and an effective response to the target goals.

An Elevated Recognition of the Importance of Culture

The 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (2010), and two following United Nations resolutions were the first to internationally recognize the importance of culture in sustainable development. United Nations Resolution 66/208 and Resolution 65/166 call specific attention to the role of all cultural aspects in the realization of the MDGs, including the development of new technologies. While strongly promoting the basic framework and ingenuity of local cultures, they call for the assistance of the international community to “actively support the emergence of local markets.” The resolution sought the protection of cultural tradition and the


18 Ibid


push to “preserve and maintain local and indigenous traditional knowledge and community practices of environmental management.” The emphasis on grassroots development and the importance of cultural diversity strengthens the depth of innovation envisioned. The international commitment to local sustainability is noted in the invitation for all United Nations Member States “to actively support the emergence of local markets for cultural goods and services and to facilitate the effective and licit access of such goods and services to international markets.” Furthermore, the solidity of local “legal framework” to better promote the conservation and protection of culture is to be encouraged strongly by the international community. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization was invited in resolution to continue to provide effective assistance and aid to developing countries as they work to achieve progress in sustainable development.

**Future Outlook**

Despite universal recognition of the importance of the need for sustainable development through the promotion of STI and the protection of culture, efforts towards the attainment of these international goals need increase. With follow-up conferences to the Rio Earth Summit, innovative ways to achieve sustainable development for all nations have often looked to the development of technologies in line with local cultures. Because of the interconnected nature of the MDGs, sustainable development, and culture, the use of STI will prove beneficial to all involved parties. If the international community hopes to move forward with the use of STI to promote sustainable development, the main barrier of the digital divide must be remedied. Through improved information exchange and technology development, the sharing of best practices will help strengthen Member States’ capacity to build development efforts that are truly sustainable and lasting. The achievement of the MDGs is dependent on international cooperation, strengthened by STI exchange, to promote a future where all can reach their highest potential.

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22 *Ibid*


Focus Questions:

1. What part has your country taken to promote sustainable development as it relates to the Millennium Development Goals and Post-2015 outlook?

2. How does sustainable development play a role in your country’s local economic growth?

3. At what point does culture conflict with the international focus on sustainable development in your country’s local politics?

4. Is there an international initiative on sustainable development in the last decade, which your country has not endorsed due to conflict of cultural values and traditions?

5. Does the “digital divide” impact your country?

6. What role may the digital divide play in your country’s ability to ensure sustainable development efforts?
2012 - International Year of Sustainable Energy for All. “2012 - International Year of Sustainable Energy for All.”

http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/about.html

http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics.html

United Nations Sustainable Development Platform. “Synthesis of National Reports for RIO+20, UN DESA/UNDP.” Available at:


World Commission on Environment and Development. “Our Common Future.”