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CSD-16 provides a valuable opportunity to review progress in sustainable development for six thematic areas, and to discuss ideas for how to accelerate that progress. In this regard, it is important to step back and think broadly. What is working? Why? How can we scale up successful concepts and approaches? What are the common elements of success? And, what progress can we make?

The pursuit of sustainable development poses significant technical, policy and institutional challenges -- from increasing the availability and efficiency of fertilizers and irrigation, to developing locally relevant land tenure systems; gaining access to export markets, managing land in a sustainable manner; and accessing financing for agriculture, health, and infrastructure investments. Many case studies discussed at this meeting illustrate promising strategies to overcome these barriers – our collective challenge is to find appropriate ways to replicate these successes.

In this critical cycle, there are at least three institutional and policy elements essential to success: i) the foundational role of science and education; ii) the empowerment of local communities to make decisions that make sense in the context of cultural, political, and environmental realities, and iii) the efficient delivery of information and tools to people in ways that allow them to adapt science and market knowledge to where they live.

Science and education are the bedrock for sustainable development progress. Our challenge is to connect scientific knowledge to on-the-ground results. While we must continue to support targeted research programs that have the potential to help people -- such as the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) – we also need to educate the next generation through formal education programs and continuing education that builds skills in today's workers.

We need to create enabling environments that empower local decision makers including farmers, women, youth, land managers, small business owners, other entrepreneurs, and community leaders. And, we need to engage them in sustainable development partnerships that address the issues before us. Countries need to meet ongoing commitments to education, gender equity, and good governance that support local institutions and communities. In short, we need to develop the capacity for people to help themselves.

A bold new approach to communication, outreach and information delivery is the final link in the chain. Knowledge cannot be disconnected from practice. With the plethora of communication and information tools at our disposal, we have an opportunity to expand the reach and effectiveness of what we know, and also push beyond today's best practices. We must ensure that research results reach local decision makers, and that emerging challenges of practitioners are rapidly conveyed to scientists. The U.S. eXtension (E-extension) program, involving thousands of scientists and practitioners, is one example of how we do this at a national level, and one example of a partnership that could be expanded internationally.

The United States is today an engine of agricultural productivity, demonstrating the power of harnessing the three drivers of sustainability – science and education, empowerment and information. The key in this CSD cycle is to identify successful examples of how nations develop in sustainable ways; to share these experiences so others can adapt successful approaches to their own situations; and finally to scale up and broadly replicate the most promising opportunities.

We must judge the success of this CSD cycle by the extent to which we are able to stimulate new actions that produce on-the-ground results. Our ultimate measure of success is improvements in the lives of people while protecting the environment for current and future generations.