

7TH SESSION OF THE OPEN WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Remarks by H.E. Mr. Bhagwant Bishnoi,
Deputy Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations
[on behalf of India-Pakistan-Sri Lanka]

January 8, 2014

Sustainable Consumption and Production and Climate Change

Mr. Co-Chair,

I have the honor to deliver these remarks on behalf of Pakistan, Sri Lanka and my own country India. We associate ourselves with the statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Fiji on behalf of Group of 77 & China.

Our full statement will be posted on the website.

Before commenting on the topic of Climate Change, I would like to briefly address the issue of sustainable consumption and production.

Mr. Co-Chair,

The central importance of sustainable consumption and production as part of a SDG framework or the larger post-2015 development agenda cannot be overemphasized. This is indeed the heart of sustainable development, the veritable 'S' of the SDGs.

We strongly feel that sustainable consumption and production should be seen as a standalone and central deliverable of the SDGs with relevant targets.

Mr. Co-Chair,

Consumption is the holy grail of sustainability. It has direct links with carbon emissions, resource over-use and wastage. Consumption is relevant to the issue of climate change as well.

As the World Economic and Social Survey 2013 notes, even countries that have apparently achieved their emission reduction targets under the UNFCCC have often done so mainly through off-shoring greenhouse gas intensive production operations to developing countries. Their consumption emissions, in other words, have remained unsustainably high.

The second issue key to framing our approach to SCP is the sheer inequity in the consumption of world's resources. As the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel pointed out pithily but starkly, 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty account for only one per cent of world's consumption of resources, while the richest 1 billion people consume 72 per cent.

Contrary to some commonly articulated misperceptions, the ecological footprint in developed countries seems to be rising at a faster pace than in developing countries. As pointed out by UN-DESA, the ecological footprint in developed countries increased from 3.8 global hectares in 1961 to 5.3 global hectares in 2007, representing an increase of 39%. In contrast, the per capita

ecological footprint in developing countries over the same time period increased by 28% from 1.4 to 1.8 global hectares, which incidentally is the same as the global average.

Therefore, Mr. Co-Chair, even as SCP is of universal relevance to all countries, this is an issue on which developed countries have to be in the lead, in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Just like poverty eradication and hunger are to be tackled primarily in developing countries, similarly the battle against unsustainable patterns of consumption will be won or lost in the developed countries. It is almost inevitable that consumption levels in developing countries, which are abysmally low in per capita levels, would grow to provide for basic needs.

Consumption is also important for the 'imitation' or 'aspirational' value of the developed country lifestyle patterns in developing countries. As has been emphasized by many speakers, if the whole world were to consume at the level of some of the most advanced countries, resources equivalent to that of 15 planets would be required. On the other hand, genuine moves towards sustainable consumption and lifestyles in developed countries would enable new aspirational models in developing countries thus creating a virtuous cycle of responsible action.

Finally, it must also be recognized that rationalizing consumption patterns does not necessarily tantamount to reduction in the quality of lifestyles. The wide difference in resource consumption levels between countries of Europe and North America attests to this fact. In fact, better lifestyles can be achieved without grossly unsustainable consumption and wastage. It should be a central endeavor of the SDGs to promote such shifts.

Mr. Co-Chair,

In terms of some concrete ideas, among the many SCP issues that can be purposely addressed in the SDG goal framework, we would like to highlight two:

First, a targeted approach for reducing the per capita consumption of energy in developed countries could produce positive results and feedback loops across various streams and is also consistent with the high priority being placed by this Group to energy and climate change issues. We had raised this issue during our discussions on Energy as well.

Energy consumption is directly related to consumption patterns and carbon emissions.

It would be useful to craft an approach based on per capita energy consumption and promote convergence between the consumption levels of developed and developing countries.

Second, we could craft a purposeful global response to tackling the unacceptably high levels of food wastage at the consumer level in the developed countries.

Food waste has often been clubbed with the issue of post-harvest losses in developing countries, which is a flawed approach. Given that over 220 million tons of food is wasted at consumer level alone in industrialized countries, a focused approach to reducing this consumption-level food wastage in developed countries is necessary.

Mr. Co-Chair,

Various policy responses, including regulatory measures, market-based pricing mechanisms, education and awareness initiatives can all contribute to implementing concrete proposals for promoting sustainable consumption and must be pursued with seriousness. Youth and women can be effective messengers of better SCP practices to our children, the next generation. Entrepreneurial and innovative youth in both developing and developed countries have actively contributed many fields of sustainable development. Their innovation and creativity is vital for exploring new knowledge for preparing the entire world for the future we want.

Mr. Co-Chair,

Climate change is a defining reality of our times. It is one of the most significant global challenges, which negatively impacts on the three pillars of sustainable development and above all on the development aspirations of the world's poorest, those who have contributed the least to the problem.

Our troika is fully committed to crafting an ambitious, comprehensive and equitable response to climate change through ongoing negotiations under the UNFCCC. We are of the firm view any international response to climate change must be in full accordance with the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities.

Even as we address this important issue, we need to bear in mind the ongoing negotiations on climate change under UNFCCC and take due care that our deliberations in this forum do not end up prejudicing or prejudging the negotiations under the UNFCCC. Specifically, the negotiations under the Durban Platform of the UNFCCC are poised at a critical juncture and parties are working to a deadline of 2015 for an outcome to this process. Given the timeline of the Durban Platform under the UNFCCC, we need to be cautious in our attempts to import the discussions on climate change into the SDGs process at this juncture.

In any case, I need hardly reiterate that while addressing climate change within the context of SDGs in whatever form, the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities shall remain fully applicable.

Does this mean however, that SDGs should not address the issue of climate change at all?

Negotiating climate change is not our task in the Group. But it is also true that we cannot ignore the threat of climate change while formulating a holistic set of sustainable development goals.

The formulation of the SDGs *can* usefully contribute to the global effort against climate change, without necessarily impacting the UNFCCC process but respecting its principles. We can do so by agreeing to meaningful deliverables on some key drivers of climate change and in creating enabling conditions to assist countries face up to this challenge.

To this end, climate change should be considered as a cross cutting issue across SDGs on various areas such as energy, infrastructure development, poverty eradication, transfer of technology, disaster risk reduction, health, food security and sustainable consumption and production.

Appropriate indicators under the energy goal that aim at the universal access to modern energy services (which would enable the poor to avoid burning wood and biomass for their energy needs), rapid deployment of renewable energy and promotion of greater energy efficiency, would immensely contribute to addressing climate change provided it is backed by a robust global partnership for development.

Similarly, when we formulate deliverables on public transportation and reduction in private automobile dependence, and creation of better and efficient infrastructure, we would be addressing climate change.

Our efforts at augmenting food security targeting food production, promoting rural productivity, generating inclusive growth and full employment and affordable housing for the poor would assist the poor in adapting to climate change.

A sincere effort at rationalizing unsustainable patterns of consumption and lifestyles in the developed countries, reducing their per capita energy and resource consumption, and per capita ecological footprints through the SDGs would be a meaningful and tangible contribution to the global fight against climate change.

Most importantly, meaningful deliverables on making available enhanced financial support and transfer of environmentally friendly technology to developing countries would assist these countries to contribute even more to the fight against climate change.

I thank you.
