

**National Consultation on SDG 2
on 13 April, 2017**

**'Achieve Food Security, Improved Nutrition and
Promote Sustainable Agriculture'**

Remarks by Chairperson RIS, Ambassador Hardeep S Puri

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) constitute perhaps the most impressive success registered by the United Nation Systems in the recent past.

At India's insistence, along with that of several other developing countries, the approach adopted was different from the one that was adopted in the case of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The intellectual work for the MDGs was done in the OECD, the think tank of the West. The MDG package had arrived at the UN as a 'pre-cooked deal' and thrust on member states. In a sense, the MDGs constituted 'advice' from the outside.

Chastened by that experience, it was decided that the SDGs would be negotiated bottom-up by member states and other stakeholders. The change was, in retrospect, not only a wise decision, but a game changer. Agenda 2030 succeeded in doing so admirably. That having been said,

there are, however, structural and ingrained problems between some of the SDGs. These need to be addressed and overcome.

SDG-2, which deals with Food Security is a case in point. It deals with both 'Achieving Food Security' and adopting and pursuing 'Sustainable Agriculture'. If approached in terms of the traditional paradigm, the effort to end hunger could end up complicating SDG-7 on sustainable energy and SDG-13, which deals with climate change.

The Green Revolution which succeeded in transforming Indian agriculture and providing enough yields to feed the world also carried high-energy costs. The privatization of seeds, erosion of land, erosion of the nutrients of the land have contributed to agriculture becoming the second largest carbon sink contributing to massive climate change.

The only way forward would appear to lie in support to local communities and farmers that have been using sustainable practices for thousands of years and invest in this knowledge with the right technology, such as creating drought resistant seeds, etc.

The problem, in a sense, lies in the very different approaches that are adopted towards 'agriculture' in India and the West. For us in India, agriculture is a 'livelihood' issue and we have traditionally supported local

communities and farmers and favoured sustainable practices over thousands years. For the West, agriculture is an industry.

Global efforts over the past decade to reduce tropical deforestation, the largest single source of land-based carbon emissions have largely failed. The only country that has succeeded in this respect is Brazil. As a recent article in the Journal 'Science' observed: overall emission trend from deforestation during the 21st century have remained frustratingly flat.

Why is Brazil an exception? Quite simply, it has three times India's land area and one-sixth its population. The Amazon region is itself equivalent to the size of India's landmass. Brazil also has 23 per cent of the world's fresh water reserves.

The targets set out for India in terms of increase in sector-wise food production in order to achieve zero hunger are well within the realm of the achievable.

Water, however, continues to be an issue of great concern and could prove to be a strategic constraint. It has been suggested (in the same article that I quoted earlier) that one way to achieve large and immediate emission reduction in the land sector is to support policies of the kind that

Indonesia has adopted, along with a new and strengthened law to conserve and restore its peatlands.

Industrial agriculture is the single largest contributor to greenhouse gases. It contributes adversely to and is affected directly by fossil fuel in production of fertilizers, and additionally through mechanization and more significantly through its land use change and deforestation that have caused this havoc. We may be facing a situation that the implementation of SDG-2, if not undertaken in harmony and in sync with SDGs 7 and 13, could end-up feeding our future generations and, at the same time, polluting and choking them to death.

As incomes rise around the globe, people are rapidly converging toward Western-style diets. High in calories, protein and animal-based foods such as meats and dairy, these have large implications for land-use change. Meat and dairy production require more land than plant-based proteins like beans and lentils.

Invariably, well organised meetings at the multilateral level, gain fair traction on account of several reasons, host country syndrome, which reflects the host country's desire to register success, the process syndrome where the negotiators need to declare victory among others. The Paris Climate agenda was certainly a great success. There were, however, significant weaknesses. The decarbonization roadmap that emerged from

Paris is, in the final analysis, anchored on voluntary offers. The Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) have not been translated into legally binding requirements. This in fact is noted in the agreement itself. The Paris Agreement “notes with concern that the estimated aggregate greenhouse gas emission levels in 2025 and 2030 resulting from the INDCs do not fall within least-cost 2° C scenarios but rather lead to a projected level of 55 gigatonnes in 2030, and also notes that much greater emission reduction efforts will be required than those associated with the INDCs in order to hold the increase in the global average temperature to below 2° C above pre-industrial levels by reducing emissions to 40 gigatonnes or to 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels by reducing to a level to be identified in the special report referred to in paragraph 21 below (Section II, 17 of the Paris Agreement).”

I would recommend an excellent article “The Winter of our Disconnect and the Neglect of Soil” by Radha Gopalan that appeared in the Wire on 13 January, 2016. Just one excerpt from that will help illustrate the point I am striving to make. “The deafening silence around soil, food and food systems in Paris was, therefore, incomprehensible. The main conference did not even list soil on its agenda, considering it’s substance that has been sequestering carbon over millennia.”

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