

SDGs and UNESCOs role in the Multilateral System

President of the General Conference

Chair of the Executive Board

Director General

Heads of States and Governments

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

While preparing to address you today, the Secretary General of our National Commission reminded me of her report, on the highly successful inter-regional meeting of National Commissions in

Shanghai last year. At that meeting, I am sure many of you recall, member states discussed with their regional colleagues exactly what we are discussing today – what is UNESCO's role in the new global agenda? To which sustainable development goals does UNESCO contribute? Where should the focus be?

The reflections from within the Asia Pacific group were that while UNESCO obviously responded to those of its direct mandate such as SDG 4 on Education, SDG 5 on Gender, the work of IHP on SDG 6 on Water and Sanitation

or the role of both the Communications and SHS programmes in contributing to SDG 16 as examples – the reality is, UNESCO contributes to all the goals of our global agenda.

So how can UNESCO best contribute and support all countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals? What is its particular role and place?

In terms of the targets of the SDGs, we are all at very different starting points – we all have our strengths and weakness, our challenges and opportunities. There

is no one size fits all in terms of a response. We are therefore better, in my view, to consider UNESCO's strength and contribution, through specific underlying principles of the SDG agenda and how they can be part of UNESCO's approach at the programme level. I would therefore like to focus my comments today on the underlying principles of national ownership, inclusivity, integration, interlinkages and multi-lateral stakeholder partnerships – all of which refer to approaches and modalities.

At the outset, allow me please to share
with you a chant from my ancestors:

Eia ngaru e tu i Ruakakau nei e Iro?

Tuatini tuamano tini

E tai i te rau ma iva

Uriuri i tana uriuri

Pokipoki i tana pokipoki

E pupui ki te niu

E raranga ki te vaka

Tiranga ki te karakia

Ka eke ia ngaru....e Iro e...

This chant speaks of the seafarer Iro,
who is looking to bring his vaka, his
canoe, carrying his people, through the

passage and onto land. It talks of being prepared, of being patient, of watching the waves, the current and the totality of the environment. It talks of preparing yourself and others to work together, to go safely through the passage. It speaks of identifying problems, issues, challenges and opportunities and working together to address them, in order to safely reach land. It draws on the value of experience and practices from the past, and of being willing to ask others for advice and knowledge.

It is about everyone working together, with a shared understanding of their goal. It is about people understanding their role, and how by collaborating with others, the desired outcome is reached for all.

As a Pacific Island, our vaka and voyaging, are very important to us. The concept of voyaging, of learning from our environment, of accepting the wisdom and understandings of those that have gone before us, and of working with nature, underpins many aspects of our lives. We speak of “our

vaka” to help define who we are and the voyage we are on as individuals, communities and as a nation.

I would like you to take a few minutes now to come on a journey with me and imagine we are all together on a canoe, out in the ocean, looking to make its way...safely to shore.

I was honored last June to present Marae Moana – our Cook Islands Marine Park, comprising all 2 million square kilometres of our Exclusive Economic Zone - to a global audience at the United Nations Global Oceans Conference in

New York. Marae Moana provides the Cook Islands with the necessary framework to promote sustainable development by balancing economic growth interests such as tourism, fishing and deep sea mining, with conserving core biodiversity and natural assets in our ocean, reefs and islands. After extensive consultations with our communities over a period of 5 years, my Government was privileged to pass the Marae Moana Act through our Parliament, unopposed, in early July. We are now working together with our traditional leaders, local governments

and our communities, to determine the parameters of our Marae Moana. The legislation aims to sustain our livelihoods, by protecting species and ecosystems as well as our cultural heritage, that we inherit and pass on to the future generations.

Marae Moana demonstrates the principles of the SDGs that I would like to address to illustrate these principles in the role and work of UNESCO.

The Marae Moana legislation, covers all the islands of the Cook Islands, but

enables the local government and leaders of each island, to develop their own island marine plan, with the assistance of legislated technical guidance and support. This sets up the potential for diverse approaches to marine management, based on an island's specific environmental conditions and its community's unique situation. It thus passes ownership at an island level to the people of that island, empowering them to take management decisions, at the local level.

In a similar vein, the intent of the sustainable development goals, is that they are integrated into national planning, policies and strategies. Supporting such work will be a fundamental task for UNESCO going forward. Much easier said than done. There is huge diversity amongst the starting point of member states both across, and within, the goals. How UNESCO programmes areas develop their own plans, will need to ensure a modality of working from the ground up – finding the points of commonality, whilst supporting individual results.

Dare I say it, much like a teacher planning a lesson for a class of different levels, and learning styles.

Facilitating nationally developed responses, rather than presenting already designed programmes, is key.

We have seen this approach in our region. I speak specifically to the work of the Education programme lead by the Bangkok office, who have taken the lead in supporting countries in the Asia Pacific region, to map their own plans against SDG 4 - Education 2030. In the conversations that occur around this

work, countries are identifying for themselves places where they can share practice, and outcomes. They are identifying gaps, and supporting each other, in finding ways to respond to these based on each country's context. This facilitative approach is going to be particularly important to Goal 4.7, where responses will need to come from the communities of our young people, as the goal gives them the skills to navigate the world ahead.

Closer to home, in the Pacific, a small working group of senior education

officials are developing the next regional education framework, as a conduit between Education 2030, and our individual countries, in the spirit of regionalism. What is important here, is that this is the first time that the countries themselves have undertaken to develop the plan, rather than external consultants paid to deliver a product. It is being owned by the countries. UNESCO act as the Secretariat to the Pacific Heads of Education, and have been supportive of such an approach.

Creating the space, and supporting the space for countries to work in this way, facilitating problem solving with countries, or clusters of countries, in order to find their own solutions, will be important if the work UNESCO undertakes is to be sustainable and relevant, beyond the 2030 agenda.

But as Member States, we also have a responsibility. We need to be open about where we need support – we should not hide things that haven't worked, but put them out there for all to see, and ask others for suggestions and

advice. Likewise, when a country is successful in approach, they should not be worried about others copying it and “getting ahead”, but putting it out there for all to celebrate, and learn from.

Marae Moana recognises the interconnectedness of our ocean. Our land, sea, and sky are all connected. Impact on one, impacts on the other. For sustainable development, in developing a response to one area, all of the interconnecting areas must also be considered to ensure they can support the intended activity and, importantly,

will not be harmed by it. Strong institutional arrangements are needed for information sharing and regular dialogue, that leads to tangible outcomes through an integrated approach.

Intersectoral work within UNESCO will become more and more important in this approach. Working in silos will achieve little. A multi-disciplinary, interlinked and integrated approach, is more efficient and effective. Our Ocean represents this perfectly with the work around Goal 14, having so many linkages

across all programme areas of UNESCO. But it is not the only goal that presents itself this way, as you cannot consider a goal on poverty eradication, without considering gender and youth, or climate action without considering water and sanitation, education and culture. The UNESCO Taskforce set up to ensure an effective approach by the agency, will need to constantly reflect on the inter-connectedness of the goals, and the need to integrate responses. They will also need to reflect on where working with other multi-lateral

agencies with intersecting mandates, leads to efficiencies.

It is our role as member states, to help them in these conversations. To provide data and feedback so that informed decisions can be made. I recognise that participating in this way is a commitment – someone, in a relevant agency in your country, is going to coordinate responding to a UIS survey or other request for information. There may be a need for training, or the development of infrastructure, to help with the collection of data. But, without this, we cannot expect the agency to

make good informed decisions, develop plans that will be effective, and instigate new initiatives. When the GEM report or the World Science Report are published – they are our reports, those are our stories, we all need to be part of that.

The Marae Moana policy invokes transparency, social responsibility and consultation. The institutional arrangements ensure the inclusion of all development sectors, and societal groups. There is specific mention of inclusiveness, in relation to gender and youth. Our challenge in developing

Marae Moana, was to shape the work in such a way, that all of our islands could define what it was to be. We needed to create cohesion and inclusiveness, while recognizing and celebrating diversity.

We must take inclusivity to another level. Open any document about the SDGs online, and do a search on the word “inclusive”. Never before has this message been so strong. Inclusive Education, Goal 4. Inclusive societies, Goal 16. Inclusive health promoting environments, Goal 3. Inclusive Science, technology and innovation policies and

systems, Goals 7 and 9. Inclusive public policy, Goal 10. Inclusive sustainable cities, Goal 11. My question to all of us here today is this: Are we recognizing inclusion in our own National Plans to the same extent?

With such a mandate, a shared understanding of what we mean to be inclusive...and it's not just the lack of exclusion...is required. The linkages between the economic, environmental and social domains have never been as important. It is those linkages that will create social transformation. How we

have historically worked to be “inclusive”, may no longer be the right approach. Targeted interventions may address a particular aspect of concern, but broader coverage will build understanding and ownership – creating solidarity in working towards a goal. Participation and empowerment, are the critical drivers of inclusive sustainable development. This does not mean simply offering an opportunity to participate, but building the capacity of society to take up that opportunity, and be part of decision making and exercise influence.

This is going to create some challenges to many institutional structures, at both a country level and in multi-lateral agencies. The strength of UNESCO here lies in its humanist mandate, with human rights and dignity, as the starting points for UNESCO action. For when we start with the intent to treating all with dignity, no matter who they are or where they come from, we will be working towards inclusion.

Partnerships is one of the key Marae Moana strategic objectives.

Partnerships are sought at all levels and across, as well as between islands and communities. These partnerships are not just within the Cook Islands, but also with others who have an interest in realising the objectives of Marae Moana. At this juncture, I am pleased to acknowledge the assistance of so many international partners such as Conservation International, Oceans 5, IUCN, the Waitt Foundation, Jack Dangermond and Esri...as well as regional partners such as SPREP and SPC.

UNESCO already has a strength in this area, through its mandate to convene, broker and facilitate partnerships.

The work on the Steering Committee on SDG-Education 2030, or the IOC on Goal 14, clearly demonstrate the role and capacity, that UNESCO has in this area.

The SDGs will require new partnerships, as well as new ways of looking at partnerships that already exist.

However, if the other principles of the SDGs to which I have already referred are upheld, the principle of working in partnership will come to fruition.

As member states, we are UNESCO, we are part of such partnerships. I accept, at times, some may be prepared to place limitations on us, but I do not accept, that we should impose limitations on ourselves.

Remember, we are on a journey. What we discuss, debate, decide and agree upon in the next two weeks, is part of that journey. There will be achievements to be celebrated, and setbacks to be endured. These setbacks will be an important part of our journey. They will help shape what UNESCO is as

an organization, and how, as member states, we contribute to the evolving maturity and growth of the organization.

We can be the voyager 'Iro', and bring our vaka safely to shore – with everybody playing their part, and everybody achieving the goal. We cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together. We may have differing opinions and views, but we all hold the common hope for the wellbeing of our own people, our neighbours, and the world as a whole.

In closing, we should not be asking these questions, or have the expectations of UNESCO, unless we also ask them and place them on ourselves, and to respond to them with the best of our ability, and capacity. As the Cook Islands we are finding our answers, they change as we navigate both our own, and the global landscape. But we adapt, we share our experiences, we work with our environment, we work together and we paddle together....to the shore.

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Tuatini tuamano tini
E tai i te rau ma iva
Uriuri i tana uriuri
Pokipoki i tana pokipoki
E pupui ki te niu
E raranga ki te vaka
Tiranga ki te karakia
Ka eke ia ngaru....e Iro

Let us all go on this journey together –
learning as we go, building relationships,
supporting each other and working
collectively, to achieve the goals for all.

Kia orana e kia manuia