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African leaders convene in Kigali as Kagame seals election victory

OPINION:

**Sustainable Development
and the fight against
poverty**

FEATURE:

**National Employment
Programme empowers youths
with industrial skills**

Sustainable Development and the fight against poverty

(Part 1 of the 2-Part Series)



BY PROF. VINCE SININING

For over fifteen years that I have served as a special adviser to select Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York, Sustainable Development and the Fight against Poverty are some of the most important issues that the World Body has successfully focused on.

The international community continues to recognize important approaches to sustainable development. Energy, health, education, water, food, gender, and economic growth are key factors on achieving sustainable development

I am hopeful that this 2-part series article will help educate our young generation of leaders in Africa on the issue of Sustainable Development and the Fight against Poverty at the United Nations. If we are to achieve our targets, we all need to join hands in helping our governments work towards a better future. "Ask not what your country can do for you," said President John F. Kennedy of the United States, "ask what you can do for your country."

On the issue of sustainable development, several major conferences have been held by the United Nations since 1990. In these conferences, governments have committed to address the most pressing problems. Spending millions of dollars in every meeting, one would wonder what has been achieved in these meetings. In my experience, the meetings enabled the international community to have a global consensus on the priorities for development agenda. Delegates of the member states came together and agreed on shared values, on shared goals and on

strategies to achieve sustainable development, on the fight against poverty, and on addressing major threats.

On June 3-14, 1992, delegates from one hundred eighty two countries came to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Earth Summit. The outcome of this meeting included a consensus on revitalizing international cooperation on development issues. Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the statement of principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests, were adopted by 180 member states. Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, Governments, and Major groups in every area in which human impacts on the environment. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development is a series of principles defining the rights and responsibilities of States. The Statement of Forest Principles is a set of

principles to underpin the sustainable management of forests worldwide.

In December 1992, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was created to ensure effective follow-up of UNCED, and to monitor and report on implementation of the agreements at all levels. During this time, member states of the United Nations agreed that a five-year review of Earth Summit progress be produced in 1997 in a special session by the UN General Assembly (UNGA).

In 1996, in recognition of Africa's urgent need for support, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) initiated the "Heavily Indebted and Poor Countries (HIPC) program." This program provided debt relief and low-interest loans to reduce external debt repayments to sustainable levels. Nominal debt service relief under HIPC to the 29 countries that have reached their decision points has been estimated to amount to about US\$62 billion, a significant share of which benefited Sub-Saharan African countries.

On June 23-27, 1997, UNGA held its 19th special session to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21. In this session, the world body [a] assessed global progress made in sustainable development, [b] identified reasons why goals set in Rio have not always been met and suggested corrective actions, [c] highlighted special issues such as finance and technology transfer, patterns of production and consumption, use of energy and transportation, scarcity of fresh water, [d] identified priorities for future action, and [c] called on governments, international organizations and major groups to renew their commitment to sustainable development.

In 2001, African heads of state launched the “New Partnership for Africa’s Development [NEPAD].” This partnership represented the response of African countries to those treats and challenges. It aimed at providing a framework for sustainable development to be shared by all Africa, emphasizing the role of partnerships among African countries themselves and between them and the international community. A noticeable component was the goal of eradicating poverty through sustained economic growth and sustainable development.

In August 26 to September 4, 2002, the international community met at the World Summit on Sustainable Development [WSSD] in Johannesburg, South Africa. In this meeting, member states reaffirmed their commitments on the full implementation of Agenda 21, the

Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21, and the Commitments to the Rio principles. The Johannesburg Summit produced an outcome document.

On May 1, 2003, in recognition of Africa as a priority area, the “Office of the Special Adviser on Africa [OSAA]” was established by the Secretary General in line with the UNGA Resolution in November 2002. The establishment of the office is in reference to Africa’s sustainable development as a cross-cutting issue in the “Johannesburg Plan of Implementation” from the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. The mission of OSAA is to enhance international support for Africa’s development and security.

In Africa, sustainable development remained elusive. Most of the member states faced poverty as a major challenge along with the major threats in desertification, deforestation, and climate change

In June 20-22, 2012, the United Nations held its Conference on Sustainable Development back in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The meeting focused on a political document which contains clear and practical measures for implementing sustainable development. Member states decided to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] built from the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] and converge with the post 2015 development agenda.

Some of the highlights on this conference are the [a] ground-breaking guidelines on “green economy policies,” [b] establishing an intergovernmental process to prepare options on a strategy for sustainable development financing, [c] strengthening the United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], [d] forward-looking decisions on thematic areas like energy, food security, oceans, cities. One noticeable achievement of this meeting was the formation of new partnerships to advance sustainable development.

The international community continues to recognize important approaches to sustainable development. Energy, health, education, water, food, gender, and economic growth are key factors on achieving sustainable development. As part of the follow-up to the 2012 Conference on Sustainable Development [Rio+20], the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN-DESA] organized the “Global Conference on Rural Energy Access: A Nexus Approach to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication.”

In Africa, sustainable development remained elusive. Most of the member states faced poverty as a major challenge along with the major threats in desertification, deforestation, and climate change. In 2012, reports have shown that only 15% of the Sub-Saharan African rural population had access to electricity. The continent also lacked infrastructure investments. The “Secretary General’s Sustainable Energy for All [SE4All] Initiative and Sustainable

Development Goal [SDG] 7” presented a worrying observation on the absence of access to modern energy services – a major obstacle to sustainable development and a major contributor to Africa’s poverty.

On December 4-6, 2013, the “Global Conference on Rural Energy Access: A Nexus Approach to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication” was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Conference provided an opportunity to strengthen capacities on policy, technical and entrepreneurial approaches to rural energy access for eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development in rural communities.

In September 2015, member states at the UN General Assembly in New York adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] and 169 targets. The new Agenda emphasizes a holistic approach to achieving sustainable development for all, building on the principle of “leaving no one behind” putting together Sustainable Development and the Fight against Poverty.

[Part 2 will be featured on the next issue]

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