

UPF-UK: Discussion about UN Sustainable Development Goals

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London, United Kingdom—Raising awareness of the UN Sustainable Development Goals that will come into effect in 2016 was the focus of a meeting held by UPF-UK.

“How Sustainable Development Goals Will Refine the Progress of Millennium Development Goals” was the title of the March 17, 2015, evening program that was attended by numerous Ambassadors for Peace and distinguished guests.

In addition to raising awareness, UPF held the meeting to build a strong community of supporters for the SDGs, which will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that have been in place from 2000 to 2015.



As Robin Marsh, secretary general of UPF-UK, remarked, “Supporting the Millennium Development Goals and now the Sustainable Development Goals is a natural part of UPF.” In accordance with the UPF motto of “Living for the Sake of Others,” UPF-UK formed a committee to support the SDGs, which it calls SDG-UPF.

Mr. Marsh explained that UPF has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and was founded on the desire to support the renewal of the United Nations. In practice, UPF globally supports many UN initiatives, he said.

James Tang, SDG-UPF project manager, encouraged those in attendance to consider how the SDGs can improve on the MDGs that have failed to make progress. He emphasized that society, corporations and governments must “take ownership.” People must be mobilized—a wide network of supporters who are essentially united in addressing the concerns of the general public, he said.



The speakers for the March 17 event, Mr. Tang said, were selected and the program set on the basis of TED-style talks that encourage the concept that the SDGs are a refinement and progression of the eight MDGs set 15 years prior.

Eleanor Kennedy, campaigns coordinator at Bond International, quoted U.S. economist William Russell Easterly, “The setting of utopian goals means aid workers will focus efforts on unfeasible tasks, instead of the feasible tasks that will do some good.” She called attention to the negative effects of public financing when a dependency on financial aid occurs; resources are provided, but there is a lack of a long-term trajectory that utilizes a sustainable process. Private companies have been left out in calling for social and corporate responsibility, she said, and an impending discussion in July will ensure “there will be a robust framework” to empower countries and organizations to be self-sufficient. These SDGs were made compliant with the UN regulations and expectations and were created by conducting an online survey directly with the UN as well as consulting over 83 countries, conducting door-to-door surveys. There is a call for responsibility from civil society and corporations to ensure that public financing will not be seen as the only source of funding used to apply the SDGs.

A majority of those in attendance had not read the UN report on post-2015 SDGs, a fact that raises the issue of the role of media. Henri-Pierre Koubaka, a journalist and the project manager at the Children’s Radio Foundation, asked what role the media will take in the launch of the SDGs. He said that it was a dangerous question, to which most people respond that “the media need to do their job,” but it is not a simple answer.

“The media need to help people understand. Our job is to hold governments and corporations accountable,” he said, to be the “gatekeeper and focus on transparency,” to push for corporate and social responsibility, to feel that these SDGs are action-oriented and that, despite there being 169 targets to be discussed at the UN Summit, that it will end with success.

There are 17 SDGs, and one of the primary ones focuses on gender equality. Cecilia Chigwada, founder of Breaking Haven Prayer Ministry and Women Today Worldwide, discussed in depth the trials and tribulations that women in Africa face. Genital mutilation, denial of ownership, violence against women, the restriction of women working in trade—these are among many issues that women face daily. Ms. Chigwada explained that her childhood experience of helping to bring up 19 children starting from age 12, when her father died, gave her firsthand experience with facing challenges. The time has come for women to speak up, she said, and when public awareness is raised, this is when more attention can be brought to gender equality and women’s rights.

Social entrepreneur Nathaniel Peat, the co-founder of GeNNex Solar and recipient of a 2013 Youth Achievement Award from UPF, at the age of 25 founded the organization The Safety Box, which uses grass-roots methods to deter violent behavior and encourage entrepreneurship among unemployed British youth. The systematic education system of British schools discourages innovators, he said, “and without innovators there will be no forward steps toward a sustainable society.” Instead, he advocates STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education, which incorporates gender equality alongside entrepreneurship to lower youth unemployment. He believes this will promote the real meaning of social enterprise as “profit for good,” which prevents the rise of “dead aid”—financial aid and resources given without education on upkeep of the products or a sustainable, long-term plan. “There needs to be sustainability through renewable solutions,” Mr. Peat said. SDGs need to include plans for basic knowledge to the countries that will be receiving aid to encourage forward progress.



BBC world affairs correspondent Humphrey Hawksley brought to light the need for social justice. He mentioned an investigation he had conducted in the Ivory Coast on the use of child labor in the cocoa trade. He was appalled by the working conditions and by the large conglomerates in the candy industries that were aware of the situation yet did nothing to correct the social and human rights injustices. He also spoke about India’s tea industry and the poor treatment for tea plantation workers. The industry is highly lucrative, yet the trade and the running of the plantations are inhumane. With the SDGs there needs to be attention to social justice and the urgent call for it. “The real issue is to create the wealth and then share it,” as there is a need for corporate and social responsibility, Mr. Hawksley said. If everyone were to contribute a bit, then it could accumulate to enough to aid global communities. The media hold the responsibility to inform and advocate, he said, and this UPF event was an example of taking action.

Following the last speaker, a panel discussion on the theme “Next Steps: What Actions Can Be Taken by Us?” was chaired by Aliu Bello, a special advisor to SDG-UPF who worked for UNICEF for 25 years. Many questions were asked on different topics, yet time was limited. The evening awakened the minds of many and spurred a great deal of networking.