

## **IIEA – 2018 Development Matters Lecture Series**

**Speech by Mary Robinson – 5 July 2018**

### **Rights and fairness – climate justice pathways to 1.5oC**

It is always a pleasure to return to the IIEA, because you provide such a valuable forum for discussion of key European and international issues. I am very happy to take part in the IIEA Development Matters Lecture Series for 2018.

We are all conscious of the complexity and breadth of issues facing those working in development cooperation today. From migration and growing pressure on humanitarian aid budgets, to closing civil society space and threats to human security; development cooperation is in a time of challenges and change.

It was the focus of our deliberations when I chaired the High Level Panel on the reform of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD. The distinguished panel of development experts recognised that the development cooperation landscape has changed beyond recognition since 1961 when the DAC was founded, and that we have entered a new era of development cooperation. The traditional lines that distinguished one group of countries from another, in what was a donor recipient relationship, have eroded, and the future is one of partnership amongst equals.

Agenda 2030 recognises that no country has achieved sustainable development and that all countries share the challenge of achieving zero carbon, climate resilient development. In fact, countries will only be successful in achieving their development goals through cooperation with others. This new era of universality, requires development cooperation partners to be more humble and to listen to and learn from other development actors and partner countries.

In the report of the High Level Panel released last year, ‘A New DAC in a Changing World: Setting a Path for the Future’, it is suggested that the DAC act as a servant leader, adopting a more inclusive approach and with a greater emphasis on outreach and dialogue with other development partners, in order to increase effectiveness and achieve results. This means that members of the DAC, development cooperation providers, will have to reform their working methods to respond more effectively to the demands and opportunities of changed development landscape.

Around the world countries at all levels of development are getting to grips with implementing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and preparing Voluntary National Reports for the UN on progress to date and challenges ahead. Ireland will present its first VNR at the UN later this month, which highlights the main elements of the SDG National Implementation Plan 2018-2020, based on the fundamental commitment of the 2030 Agenda to leave no-one behind and to reach the farthest behind first.

## Check Against Delivery

We have known for a long time that the environment and climate change are part of development. The natural resources on which development depends in many parts of the world are vulnerable to changes in the climate and to environmental degradation. In many developing countries the links between human development and environmental health are direct - dirty water means sickness and disease, depleted soils mean hunger, extreme weather events mean loss of life, of livelihood and of economic opportunity.

I saw this first hand when I visited Malawi in early June. I went to the village of Kanyera, where I met Lucracia Fimlimoni who explained to me that changing weather patterns associated with climate change mean that in recent years she has struggled to grow enough food to feed her family. In the face of these climate impacts her community has been working with the support of Irish Aid and Trocaire to build irrigation systems, improve watershed management and make changes to their crop production techniques to increase their resilience. The hard work is paying off and as a community they are coping better with the uncertainties in the weather and the growing season, as well as more extreme weather events.

The vulnerability of people at the local level, and of women in particular, to the impacts of climate change is also understood by government officials. At a meeting in Lilongwe with Government of Malawi officials, UN Women and civil society representatives, Tawanga Mbale, Director of Environmental Affairs, made a statement that captured the impact of climate change on sustainable development. She said “women’s path to prosperity is even harder because of climate change”. Women play a central role in agriculture in Malawi providing over 70% of the labour force. As Lucracia explained, climate change is impacting all elements of food and nutrition security compounding the injustice of climate change. Living in the tropics they suffer greater extremes of weather and temperature than we do in the temperate parts of the world.

Ultimately Lucracia understands and experiences every day the links between her environment, her quality of life and her right to development. Her knowledge of the interlinked nature of the factors that determine her well-being is well developed and immensely valuable. Yet, the international community has taken longer to understand and act on this understanding, and even longer to value the knowledge and lived experience of women like Lucracia.

Around the world women entrepreneurs are setting up renewable energy projects, seeing the benefits for their communities in terms of access to electricity, job creation, improved health due to reduced indoor air pollution and increased safety due to street lighting, reliable lighting in hospitals and clinics and safer storage of food and medicines. Women are also being trained as solar technicians and community sales representatives – and they are trusted in these roles by customers due to the fact that they are known and have standing in their community. Overlooking the role of women in a zero carbon economy would be a big mistake – embracing their knowledge and skills can only bring benefits.

Recent statistics give hope that a new form of green development is starting to gain traction. A report released at the end of May announced that the ‘green economy’ is now worth approximately USD \$4 trillion, roughly the same as the fossil fuel sector. While the fossil fuel economy is shrinking the green economy is growing. The main contributors to the green economy, however, are industrialised countries like the US, Japan, Germany and France. There are green economy players in the global south, like Ethiopia and Mongolia, but they are not yet significant contributors to the global green economy. There are also countries developed and developing that continue to rely on fossil fuels and

## Check Against Delivery

where the pace of change is slower. The challenge for most developing countries is to lift their citizens out of poverty while reducing their reliance on fossil fuels and embracing climate resilient, zero carbon development.

As the pace of climate action increases in pursuit of the temperature goals set in the Paris Agreement, to keep warming well below 2°C (above pre-industrial levels) and to pursue 1.5°C, there will be a need to draw on the lessons learned and experience in the development community to ensure that climate policies and actions deliver for people as well as for the planet.

As most of you will know, I came to climate change through human rights, when I observed the impacts it was having on the social and economic rights of people and communities I was working with in Africa. I was also influenced by the work of Barbara Ward, the founder of the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED), when I served as chair of its board of Trustees. Barbara was well ahead of her time in making the connections between environment and development. In her book "Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet", published in 1972 she writes of the need "clearly to define what should be done to maintain the earth as a place suitable for human life not only now, but also for future generations". These concepts were taken up in the 1980's by my fellow Elder Gro Bruntland. She chaired the World Commission on Environment and Development which provided the definition of sustainable development used across the world today.

When I returned to Ireland to set up the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice in 2010, I was determined to find fair, rights based solutions to an unjust global problem. And as time progressed and I learned more about the transition we need to make to a zero carbon future, I started to question the impacts that transition might also have on human rights. All this at a time when the relevance of human rights to those in the climate community was still in its infancy.

I have learned from climate scientists that to avoid the worst impacts climate change on humanity and on ecosystems, the global community must strive to reach the 1.5°C goal set in Paris. This is ambitious, it is incredibly challenging, the scale of transformation required surpasses anything humanity has done before – but it can be done and it has to be done. It will involve doing more of the things we now understand well, like afforestation and renewable energy, and it will mean developing new technologies for negative emissions – something we understand less well in terms of possible physical, socio-economic and ethical impacts. These are new areas of concern from a human rights perspective.

Human rights can help to capture the opportunities presented by a zero carbon world, as well as reducing the risks posed by a rapid transition where climate action is rolled out at scale. That is why my Foundation worked so hard with a group of champion countries and civil society organisations to ensure that human rights were part of the Paris Agreement. We were determined not just to recognise the risks posed to human rights from climate change but also the threats to human rights from climate action. The resulting reminder to all countries in the preamble of the Agreement to respect and consider human rights in ALL climate action, signals an important step forward in integrating a rights based approach.

The importance of this commitment can't be overestimated. Attention to human rights in climate action can avoid negative impacts on local communities, unforeseen delays, court cases and conflict.

This goes for all sectors including business and those involved in green growth initiatives. As opportunities arise in this transition to sustainable development, it is imperative that investors and businesses protect human rights in their investments, operations and supply. Renewable energy companies need to understand their supply chains and engage in human rights due diligence throughout the life of a project. They also need to work with local communities to increase affordable access to energy and share project benefits. Business and investors should deliver a just transition to a low carbon economy that respects human rights.

Worryingly, figures from the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre show that just because climate action is good for the planet does not mean it is always good for people. Since 2015, the Centre has approached companies 128 times to respond to allegations of human rights abuse associated with renewable energy projects, including land grabs and displacement, violations of the right to free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples, harm to livelihoods, and violence against communities and rights defenders. More than 50% of allegations the Resource Centre has received relate to projects in Central & South America and 28% in Asia. Whilst not questioning the need for a rapid transition, business and investors in the room should take heed to such cases - from a moral standpoint but also from a business standpoint, as such cases undermine a license to operate and cause costly delays.

The value of engaging communities in climate action is now recognised in the White Paper 'Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030' and research and practice from Scotland shows the value of community ownership of renewable energy and the critical importance of engagement processes in ensuing community support for climate action<sup>1</sup>. The National Dialogue on Climate Change provides another important opportunity to get broad stakeholder engagement with climate action in Ireland – to envisage a zero carbon economy and to capture the benefits of an inclusive and just transition to a climate resilient Ireland. Just yesterday the Oireachtas decided to set up a special joint committee on climate action to take account of the recommendations of the Citizen's Assembly.

Just last week, in a paper published in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, Tara Shine and I make the case that the risks posed by climate change and temperature increases above 1.5 and 2°C to human rights far outweigh the risks posed to human rights from climate action (things like renewable energy installations, tidal barriers or community based adaptation projects). The risks associated with more than 1.5°C of warming are large, unpredictable and often irreversible – for example the loss of coral reefs or the slowing of the gulf stream. On the other hand, the risks posed by climate action can be mitigated by attention to human rights, gender equality, ethics and good practice in policy making. The lessons learned by development practitioners on how to design effective policies, that are inclusive, environmentally and socially sound, and economically beneficial are critical repositories of knowledge and experience for the transition to a zero carbon, climate resilient world.

For example, in Ecuador, recognition of the links between the right to participation and environmental rights is a principle of the national climate change strategy. Ecuador's Constitution recognises rights of participation, rights for indigenous peoples and rights for the environment and it explicitly links all three, promoting their mutual integration within Government actions and programmes. The State is obliged to 'to establish and implement programmes with the participation of the community to ensure conservation and sustainable use for biodiversity'.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14702541.2017.1406132>

## Check Against Delivery

In keeping with this commitment, the Socio Bosque programme aims to conserve 4 million hectares of forests, reducing deforestation, and improving the lives of 1 million people. The work to conserve the forests is carried out by people like Medardo Ortiz, a husband, father and school teacher who lives in Dureno, a small community of indigenous A'ï Cofán people in north-eastern Ecuador.

Madardo and other participants in the programmes voluntarily decide how much forest to conserve and sign a per-hectare agreement with the Ministry of Environment. Through these conservation agreements funds are generated and communities create an investment plan to decide how the funds will be used. The communities hold meetings with full participation by all members so that everybody has a say in deciding what the funds will go towards. Funds can only be used in productive ways that benefit the whole community, through for example education, housing, conservation, healthcare, ecotourism, surveillance and fund saving projects.

As Medardo says: *“In the past we looked after forest but we’ve never received any benefit. .... We are happy to maintain our long tradition of taking care of the forest and pass it along to our own children. This programme shows the positive impact we can have on the forest and the planet when our work is valued.”*

Climate change is a reminder of our interconnectedness, locally and globally. No country, be it Ireland, Malawi, Ecuador or the United States, can tackle climate change alone. For each country contributing their fair share can take a different form. Small Island States will focus on investing in adaptation to cope with sea level rise and salt water intrusion, as well as decentralised renewable energy. Big emitters will emphasise greenhouse gas emissions reductions in their own economy and are required to provide financial and technical support to assist developing countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change. As our article in Nature Climate Change points out, this support for developing countries is critical for a just pathway to 1.5°C, so that less wealthy countries don't get left behind in the transition to a green economy.

The focus now is on the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the steps each country is taking to reduce their emissions and increase climate resilience. The Talanoa or Facilitative Dialogue taking place under the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change this year is the first review of progress towards the temperature goals set in Paris. Its outcomes will equip the international community with the information needed to increase the ambition of pre- and post-2020 Nationally Determined Contributions (or NDCs), the voluntary actions each country committed as part of the Paris Agreement. This is critical as current NDCs have the world on a path to 3°C or more of warming – and the certainty of large scale climate injustice.

The format of the Talanoa Dialogue is shaped by Fijian tradition, and has at its core, the purpose of sharing stories, building trust and empathy. Anyone in the audience who participated in the Hunger-Nutrition - Climate Justice Conference, convened by my Foundation and the Irish Government here in Dublin in 2013, will be familiar with this format, as it mirrors the learning circles approach we used at that event and which my Foundation has used as a mode of convening over the past 8 years. The Talanoa tradition echoes the principles of Climate Justice and has brought a new form of equitable decision making to the climate convention.

The effect is to level the negotiations and to hear all concerns and ideas on an equal footing. I believe this will be critical to shaping the next phase of climate action worldwide...where every countries'

## Check Against Delivery

actions and commitments count towards the collective good. Action at home and action on the international stage will have to go hand in hand – as international scrutiny of each countries actions and inactions increases.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will release its special report on the 1.5°C temperature goal this October. A draft is currently with governments for review and it is expected to highlight the increased risks associated with 1.5 versus 2 °C of warming.

2018 should be remembered in the future as the year when the IPCC published a report that made an unequivocal case for 1.5°C and called for a just transition to zero carbon by 2050. A time when countries large and small held a series of dialogues where they listened to each other and learned from each other, and where the global consensus was that all countries should scale up their climate action before 2020, with leadership coming from the most polluting nations. A year when an understanding of the co-benefits of climate action and implementing the SDGs informed zero carbon planning and climate resilient development in countries around the world.

In my time as President of Ireland, and in the roles I have played since then, I have always been proud to visit Ireland's development cooperation programmes around the world. They are programmes powered by compassion and empathy, driven by committed and talented staff and informed by an understanding of Ireland's role in a changing world. The power we have lies in our ability to understand the needs of others and to use our influence to make a difference. That difference must be underpinned by a commitment to the Rule of Law, respect for the rights of every person, gender equality and social inclusion. These are the values that make us human and that make us Irish. It is no surprise to me that the approach is completely aligned with the principles of climate justice.

Let me end with some words of wisdom from Barbara Ward, who helped me to connect my passion for people to a passion for the natural world. *'We have forgotten how to be good guests, how to walk lightly on the earth as its other creatures do'*.

Our commitment to protect this small planet, must go hand in hand with our commitment to the rights of all of the people that call it home.

Thank you.