



Helen Clark & Tarja Halonen

Resetting the global development agenda at the Rio+20 summit

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Summary

President Tarja Halonen's speech focused on political leadership of sustainable development. She argues that sustainable development should not be thought of as one entity, but as an integrated whole.

The need for stronger leadership is obvious, especially in politics. Halonen calls for generic changes in political decision-making. Good governance is at the heart of sustainable development, and all governments should advance its basics to empower people to make sustainable choices. Better accountability in political and economic decision-making is also a part of the transition towards sustainable development.

Concrete and pragmatic actions should be taken, and the Global Sustainability Panel agreed on urgent actions on three fronts: people must be enabled to make sustainable choices, the concept sustainable development must be incorporated into the mainstream economic policy debate, and government practices and institutions must be improved.

The process of measuring progress must also be changed, and new set of indexes should be created to cover both economic growth, and other aspects of sustainable development.

New incentives for long-term sustainability are also needed. Increased finance for sustainable development and transition to green growth is also necessary. To be able to achieve sustainability, an effective framework of institutions and decision-making processes is needed in all levels. Halonen proposed as they had discussed in the High-Level Panel, that the creation of a global sustainable development council should be addressed. Sustainable Development Goals, like the Millennium Development Goals, should be considered. Halonen concluded by voicing out her hope that in Rio we would get a strong commitment for doing this.

Helen Clark's keynote speech discussed sustainable development with the aim of going from shared principles to practice. It included the threefold development agenda which addresses social, economic and environmental concerns. Clark referred to the post-2015 development framework and environment, the SDGs and the role of governance and political leadership in sustainable development, the different measures of development (e.g. GDP versus HDI), and the prospects of the Rio +20 conference. The cause to be advanced at the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development is to figure out how to accelerate human progress while sustaining the planet's ecosystems. Sustainability should not be treated merely as an environmental issue.

Clark calls for Rio+20 to be practical, it needs to connect aspirations for a sustainable world with what is needed to realize them. Before discussing what could be accomplished in Rio, Clark discussed the evolution of the concept sustainable development from the 1970s to the current era. Despite the progress made in this field over the decades, Clark identifies the inconvenient truth to be that ending poverty still remains a vast and unfinished agenda, and that inequality is further increasing.

There is an urgent need to put shared principles into practice as risks caused by unsustainability have increased and for example extreme weather phenomena have been a cause for major humanitarian crises in the past years. Poverty can reinforce cycles of environmental destruction also. In a world where inequality expands, population rises and environmental degradation accelerates, and old economic models falter, sustainable development should be seen as an opportunity to address urgent global challenges.

Clark also discussed UNDP's triple win policies and programming, which are advancing economic, social and environmental objectives simultaneously.

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