

First Regular Session of the Executive Board, 2016

Speech delivered by Dr David Nabarro, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Madame President of the Board: congratulations on your election.

Thank you very much indeed Executive Director for an extraordinary speech and for that amazing introduction. I am sure that I am holding you all up from your commenting on what the Executive Director has said and I hope that I can complement a little bit her remarks.

Excellencies and Ladies and Gentlemen, what I would like to do is to start by reading a statement that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has sent to the Board:

“I am pleased to send greetings to the Executive Board of the World Food Programme. You meet at one of the most challenging times in memory for the WFP and for all humanitarian actors. The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic and other crises in the world today, as well as the effects of the current El Niño, are creating unprecedented demands.

Some days ago, Executive Director Ertharin Cousin and I visited communities in Ethiopia affected by severe drought linked to El Niño. I found suffering, but I also found hope. Thanks to the resilience built by the Ethiopian Productive Safety Net Programme, affected communities are confident that they can rebound stronger when the next rains come but they do need help now.

As we embark on implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring food security, improving nutrition and creating inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems will be essential. How we choose to grow, process, distribute and consume the food we eat will have a profound effect on people, planet, prosperity and peace.

A lasting end to hunger and undernutrition cannot be achieved in isolation. To achieve zero hunger we must deliver on all the Sustainable Development Goals. And we will have to make extra effort to reach the millions of people who are so often left behind, not least those affected by protracted crises. The World Humanitarian Summit, in Istanbul in May, will explore how we can help people better prepare for and respond to shocks, and become more resilient.

The entire United Nations system must work in synergy to support governments and their people as they implement the 2030 Agenda. I am encouraged that WFP is aligning its 2017–2021 Strategic Plan with the Sustainable Development Goals. WFP consistently demonstrates how integrated approaches can actually deliver for people and for the planet. Through your Purchase for Progress and safety net programmes,

you have enhanced resilience, improved nutrition and health, and empowered small-scale producers.

In 2012, I issued my Zero Hunger Challenge to end hunger within a generation. Since then, we have steadily accelerated advocacy, action and accountability to launch a global movement that will end hunger and malnutrition and build truly sustainable agriculture and food systems. We must not yield until we can say that we are Generation Zero Hunger.

I thank you and I wish you a fruitful meeting”.

Madame Chair and Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, friends with whom I have worked for many years, I would now like to offer a few remarks as a supplement to what the Secretary-General says. I am going to use five headings.

I will start by telling you what I have been asked to do by the Secretary-General in my new job. Secondly, I am going to reflect on what the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development means for all of us. Thirdly, I want to talk about the implications of the new agenda for the United Nations system. Fourth, I want to focus specifically on zero hunger within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And fifth, I would like to say some remarks about why WFP is so important in the work that lies ahead. I appreciate that always, in a situation like this, time is at a premium and so my clock is running and I am going to stick to the time available.

First: When the Secretary-General contacted me in December and said “I would like you to serve as a Special Adviser”, he pointed out to me that I was following in the footsteps of Amina Mohamed: as all of you will know she has been incredibly effective in helping UN Member States to establish the basis of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Secretary General has asked me to help ensure that the ambitions of world leaders are fully realized and that the 2030 Agenda is implemented effectively from the moment it came into force – January 1st 2016. After the Millennium Development Goals had been agreed there was an interval of several years before they were energetically implemented. The ambition with the 2030 Agenda is that it should be intensively implemented from the start. The 2030 Agenda consists of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets. It includes the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing. It is combined with the Sendai accord on Disaster Risk Reduction as well as the COP 21 Climate agreement reached in December 2015. The Agenda will be embellished by the results of the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016.

Implementation requires all of us to transform our work to a people-centred and planet-sensitive agenda with local, national and global momentum for implementation. We must remember at all times that it is about the well being of future generations: this will depend on whether or not we can bring the 2030 Agenda

to life. This is not the agenda of the United Nations system: it was agreed by all the Member States through their Heads of State and government and they own it to the full.

In my role I have three core responsibilities: first - to help the Secretary-General listen to and respond to the intentions and aspirations of the Member States; second – to help the Secretary-General ensure that the United Nations system is helping member states to pursue the new Agenda (indeed, it will transform the work of the United Nations system), and third to help ensure that a wider community of engaged actors in civil society, in business, in the media, among faith groups, in academic bodies, is actively pursuing the new Agenda and is galvanizing action at local level.

So these are the three areas of focus: Member States, United Nations system and the wider community of actors.

I work with a small team: we will help the Secretary-General through engaging with others who are committed to the Agenda. That is why I am delighted to have been invited to be with you today. As the Executive Board of WFP you are a critical group of powerful actors steering this great organization as it works within the context of the 2030 Agenda and – in all that it does – delivers results that reflect the different dimensions of the Agenda.

[I would like to give a special vote of thanks to WFP. During the last eighteen months until 31 December, I was Special Envoy on the response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. I would like to use this moment to reflect WFP’s extraordinary contribution to the collective response to Ebola. This would have been far much less effective if it had not been for the contribution of WFP. The Executive Director and staff of WFP went out of their way to find better ways to enable the world to respond to the Ebola outbreak. I would like personally to thank the Executive Director and Regional Director Denise Brown, and all their teams].

So to my second point. The 2030 Agenda requires us all to work differently.

It is universal and applies to every country in the world. This makes it different from the Millennium Development Goals which applied principally to developing countries. The new Agenda is for everyone. In the context of the Agenda, every country is a developing country: every country needs to change the way it does things to contribute to a sustainable world of the future. The Agenda is people-centred and based on human rights and social justice.

The Agenda gives priority to leaving nobody behind: this means not just focusing on averages but looking specifically at the people who are missed out because they are hard to get to, or because they are not easily able to participate in development activities.

It is national governments and their institutions that have central responsibility for the Agenda but they agree to function in an inclusive way, involving all communities and institutions.

The Agenda calls for policy coherence on global issues including climate, risk reduction, empowerment of women and people affected by protracted crises. The goals within the Agenda are indivisible: that means not picking on one or two goals and leaving others. All seventeen goals are important and integrated action is essential. Within the United Nations we bring together work on peacebuilding, human rights, humanitarian action and development.

We seek to build crosswalks between what have sometimes been seen as separate activities. This means that those working in conflict zones focus on the totality of the Sustainable Development Agenda. They seek to ensure that human rights feature throughout the new Agenda. They cannot say “I am just working on food, she is just working on water, he is just working on gender equality, they are just working on democratic institutions”. Now, all of us have to be prepared to work right across the goals: poverty, malnutrition, food systems, rural prosperity, women’s empowerment, health and education, diets, water sanitation, economic growth, natural resources, governments, climate resilience, and democratic institutions. We have to be able to work at interfaces between sectors and disciplines, because that is what the new Agenda requires.

This means that new ways of working need to be established in institutions of government, in universities, and in advocacy groups: this will, sometimes, be uncomfortable, but it is what we have been asked, by the world’s leaders, to do. Those who are thinking through the implications of this new way of working recognize that they cannot just “bend” the agenda to suit their prior working style. Their Governments have to introduce new matrix management systems. Their leaders need to articulate new policies. And they need to be sure that they are implemented and to be accountable for them to their people. This may call for new Ministerial arrangements at cabinet-level. In all countries. All have to be prepared to do things differently.

There is a need for focus and clarity.

There are major cross-cutting challenges. First: financing, what kinds of financial instruments are right for this new Agenda? Second: data, what kind of data are required to assess progress against the goals? Third: capabilities, which new skills are needed in this new Agenda. Fourth: communication and campaigning: how do we communicate it to our publics, to our supporters? Five: engaging young people who are particularly comfortable with this new Agenda because for them it is closer to reality and to their concerns about their future.

Now, my third part: implications for the United Nations system. In the United Nations, we have organizations that see themselves as focussing on different aspects of human development. So here in Rome we have three organizations that

work intensively on food and agriculture: who could be seen as at the centre of the second Sustainable Development Goal (zero hunger and sustainable agriculture). But the UN Secretary-General has been very clear: no part of the United Nations should seek to “own” any one of the goals. Instead we see ourselves as working across all the goals. Zero hunger is linked to poverty reduction, social protection, gender equity, both sustainable production and consumption, and partnerships. This set of linkages does create challenges for the governing bodies of UN organizations that would like their organizations to stay tight and focussed on their “core business”, avoiding what they see as “mission creep”.

These kinds of questions are being addressed by the Member States who are governors of the UN system right now. They want to make sure that the UN system supports implementation in an efficient and effective manner, without duplication or competition. There will be requests for clarity on who is responsible and accountable for which targets among the seventeen goals. These issues are being addressed by the representatives of Member States in New York within the context of ECOSOC, the General Assembly, the high-level political forum, and the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review: the Member States want to be sure that the United Nations system is fit for purpose on the 2030 Agenda. This is part of the effort to ensure that the UN system responds to some of the financing challenges that are presently being experienced, especially given the limitations of access to precious extra-budgetary funding.

Fourthly, I focus on food security and nutrition within the context of the 2030 Agenda. In the last decade we have witnessed a growth of different platforms, movements, entities and functions that relate to food systems, nutrition, sustainable and climate compatible agriculture, rural livelihoods and social protection. New approaches to stewardship are seeking to oversee the constellation of initiatives: I am delighted that Ambassador Gornass, the Chair of the Committee on World Food Security, is in this room together with members of her secretariat. It will always be challenging to find the right mechanisms for stewardship of interwoven constellations of initiatives that relate to the 2030 Agenda. Hence the importance of working on stewardship and accountability across all the areas in the new Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Modern approaches to stewardship must be able to handle constellations of global, regional and local actors each with different mandates and governors that address specific challenges. This will be mentally challenging as “tidy” architectures do not exist. But it is not impossible to establish platforms in which multiple stakeholders work for a shared objectives.

We have seen such an attempt by the countries that have participated in the Movement for Scaling Up Nutrition in the last six years. The Governments involved have encouraged different groups to come together and work within multi-stakeholder platforms guided by common purpose and a willingness to put their people at the centre. They have established networks through which supporting organizations –

donors, civil society, the UN system and businesses – come together under the leadership and direction of national authorities. I am grateful to WFP for participating in the Movement and to the Executive Director for being an active member of the Movement’s Lead Group.

There is still a lot to be learned from such arrangements that seek to get the best out of plural systems with multiple actors. The test of success is the extent to which such arrangements make a difference to the lives of local people and their communities. Do they enable the people who are most likely to be left behind to access what they need to live healthy lives and to enjoy resilient and sustainable livelihoods? This is the compass that should guide everyone as the 2030 Agenda moves forward: it is at the heart of implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Lastly, on WFP: what you have built in WFP over the last decades but particularly what you have managed to develop in the recent years since 2008, since the food price crisis, is remarkable. You have established a narrative and a way of working that is internally consistent and easily understandable to anybody who chooses to examine what you do and how you do it. You start always with a focus on people who are likely to be left behind. You seek to understand the context within which they face their challenges. You work within the context of both a human eco-system and a planetary eco-system. You see issues of environmental sustainability and climate as key facets of your work. You have moved beyond food assistance to ensuring good nutrition, in all its dimensions: an important evolution. You have developed ways of working in partnership that are seen as examples across the United Nations system, and the system is learning from you at all times. And you have established platforms for working across multiple domains, particularly in humanitarian action. These common support platforms contribute to the effectiveness of United Nations entities, governments and other response partners.

You are seen as “best in class” and, at the same time, as a good team player: you make good use of your convening power and your expertise in effective and accountable partnerships. You are relevant to the full spectrum of Sustainable Development Goals: you are well suited to the 2030 Agenda and you want to be sure that you contribute optimally to it. It will be challenging to do so given your wish to be efficient at all times, and to avoid distractions in your work (the “line of sight” referred to by the Executive Director) but I believe it is possible. You have a unique team of fourteen thousand personnel who are committed to being effective, efficient and – indeed – to leaving no-one behind. I anticipate that every one of your staff sees themselves as an ambassador for, and a champion of, the 2030 Agenda.

In conclusion: this is the first Executive Board of a UN entity that I have addressed in my capacity as Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I would like to hear your reactions either now, or later on if you have time to share them with me. I am keen that you help me in my quest to advise the UN Secretary-

General on how the UN system can support the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Madame President, Madame Executive Director: thank you for this precious opportunity to be with you today.