■ Contribution

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Sustainable Development Goals

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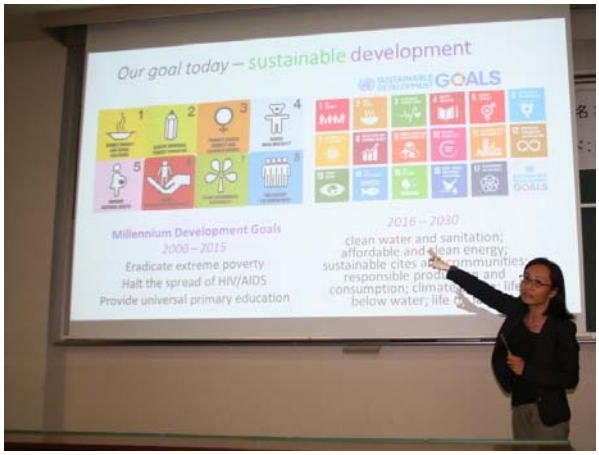
From the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals



Okayama University invited Dr. Nakai to talk on the SDGs on October 24, 2017

The eight **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs) were the first of its kind to bring together the nations around the world to work toward concrete global targets in development. The MDGs envisioned to create a world by 2015, in which the proportion of people suffering from extreme poverty and hunger was halved as well as that from lack of sustainable access to safe drinking water, the spread of HIV/AIDS was contained, universal primary education was achieved with gender parity, the mortality rate of children under five was reduced by two-thirds, and environmental considerations were integrated into country policies and programmes.

The MDGs were signed by 189 countries and monitored with 21 targets and 60 indicators. At their conclusion, the targets met were on: extreme poverty, access to safe drinking water, living conditions of slum dwellers, gender disparity in primary and secondary education, and incidence of malaria. The other targets, in particular those related to education and health were achieved successfully by very few of the signatory countries, about 10-20%.

The causes of shortfall were identified by many, ranging from insufficiency in commitment, resources, focus and accountability to limitations in various other aspects: the elaboration process (the consultation was not sufficiently inclusive), the structure (the variations among countries and the linkages between the Goals were neglected), the content (equity, equality and environmental issues were not properly addressed) and the implementation and enforcement (reliable and comparable data and evidence on feasibility were scarce, and no practical roadmap existed). The MDG framework has been summed up as one that rests on the idea of "rich helps the poor." The international agencies adjusted, estimated, or modeled close to half of the data used by the MDGs, which led to policy implications divergent from what was based on national data.

The **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) encompass the goals set forth by the MDGs and much beyond, with 17 goals, 169 targets and 232 indicators. The SDGs are more inclusive in scope and approach the topics of inequality and sustainability as universal themes; they define themselves to be the goals for the humanity and the planet, and pledge to leave no one behind. Consequently, the SDGs are more ambitious than the MDGs in their targets; instead of halving the population in poverty, for example, the SDGs aim to eradicate poverty. Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs recognize that development is not a purely economic phenomenon, but also a matter of inclusiveness and the environment; these elements are interconnected and the latter two need to be fully mainstreamed for development in the true sense of the word. The formulation process of SDGs was global in scale and through intensive stakeholder engagement.[1] The worldwide stakeholder engagement continues into the implementation phase through the **Partnerships for the SDGs online platform**.

Some of the criticisms of the MDGs are carried over to the SDGs, namely that the Goals are unrealistic, lack legal binding, and leave room for political maneuvering at the national level. The question of how to obtain reliable, disaggregated data at the national level is yet to be resolved. A review of the SDG targets concluded that among the total 169 targets, 49 were well developed, 91 could be strengthened by being more specific, and the remaining 29 required significant revision for practical use.

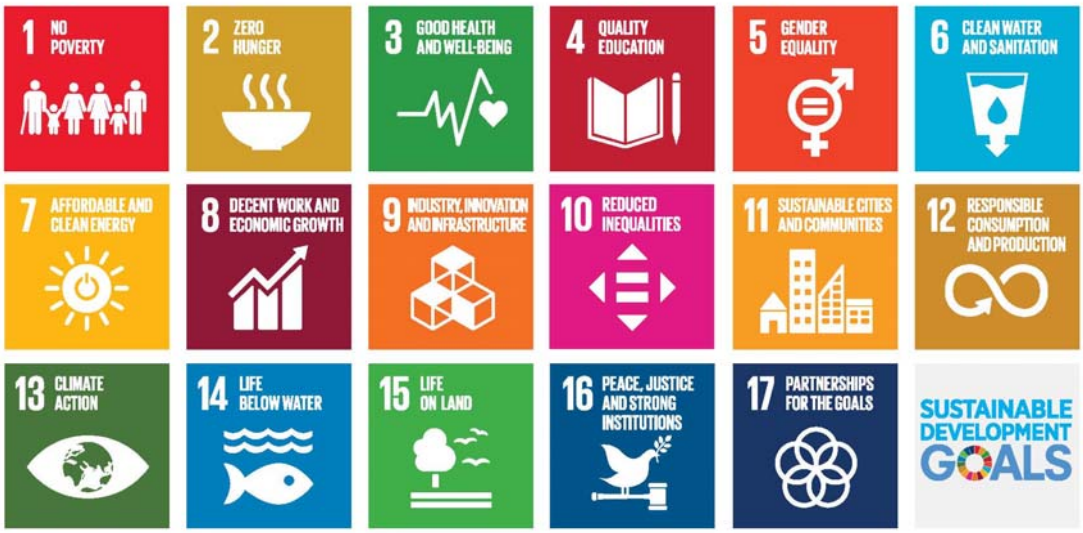
The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the SDGs

The **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations** (FAO) has chosen **Goal 2** of the SDGs, as its flagship Goal: **"End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture,"** or **"Zero hunger"** for short. It is a natural choice given that the Organization's mandate is to support members in their efforts to ensure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food. Its five **Strategic Objectives** as well as many of its initiatives are in line with the Goal.[2] The **Committee on Agriculture** (COAG) – a governing body under FAO – has more than 100 member-nations and provides policy and regulatory guidance on agriculture, livestock, food safety, nutrition, rural development and natural resources management. The Organization has also established a platform called the **Global Partnership Initiative for Plant Breeding Capacity Building** (GIPB), which is an information clearing house for sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. The **Committee on World Food Security** (CFS) is an inclusive international and intergovernmental platform to ensure food security and nutrition for all. It develops and endorses policy recommendations and guidance on food security and nutrition, and reports to the UN General Assembly and FAO Conference. The **Codex Alimentarius** is a collection of standards, guidelines and codes of practices for the purpose of ensuring consumer health and fair practices in food trade. Its Commission is housed under the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.

In relation to the SDGs, the **key messages of the FAO** have been officially defined as: food and agriculture

can contribute massively to achieving the SDGs; FAO is supporting countries in achieving the 2030 Agenda;[3] and, we achieve Zero Hunger if we work together. FAO has made a commitment to end extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition, to promote sustainable agriculture and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources for development, and to fight against and building resilience to climate change. The SDGs aim to be strategies that are nationally owned and supported by integrated national financial framework. In this context, FAO assists member countries to achieve transformational changes proposed by the SDGs through designing, implementing, and monitoring policies, programmes, investments and partnerships at national and regional levels.

FAO believes that SDG 2 calls for accelerated investment in food and agriculture, which will be catalytic for changes across all Goals. The goal of zero hunger will necessarily end extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition, and promote sustainable management of natural resources. Moreover, moves toward zero hunger will require mitigating climate change, while adapting and building resistance to it. In other words, food and agriculture represent the fundamental connection between people and the planet, and FAO's commitment to end hunger will contribute toward achievement of no poverty (**Goal 1**), good health and well-being (**Goal 3**), gender equality (**Goal 5**), clean water and sanitation (**Goal 6**), decent work and economic growth (**Goal 8**), industry, innovation and infrastructure (**Goal 9**), reduced inequalities (**Goal 10**), responsible consumption and production (**Goal 12**), climate action (**Goal 13**), life below water (**Goal 14**), life on land (**Goal 15**), and peace, justice and strong institutions (**Goal 16**).[4]



Monitoring the SDG Targets

Each global **SDG indicator** has a **'custodian' agency** assigned by the **UN Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators**, a working group of the UN Statistical Commission. Their responsibilities lie in compilation, verification and aggregation of country data and metadata as well as in submission of the data to the

United Nations Statistics Division. Tasks such as development of international standards, recommendation of monitoring methodologies and strengthening national monitoring and reporting capacity also fall on the shoulders of these agencies so that the country data would be internationally comparable. In case data estimation or adjustment is required, the agencies will engage the country in question to carry it out. FAO is custodian of 21 indicators[5] and assumes a lesser role of a contributing agency for 4 additional ones.[6]

FAO has long been engaged in relevant data collection and analysis. It monitors: the **FAO Food Price Index**, a measure of the monthly change in international prices of a basket of food commodities; **FAOSTAT**, a country-specific information on production, trade, inputs, emission, investment, and so on, all in relation to agriculture; the **State of Food Insecurity in the World** provides data on undernourishment by country and region. The **Agricultural Market Information System** (AMIS), whose Secretariat includes FAO, unites the major trading countries of agricultural commodities to assess global food supplies and to provide a platform to coordinate policy actions when commodity markets are volatile. The **Global Food Market Information Group** functions under AMIS to provide reliable, accurate, timely and comparable market and policy data and information. The COAG activities are supported by the **Monitoring and Analyzing Food and Agricultural Policies** (MAFAP) program; it collects, assembles and uses policy-relevant data –such as prices, market access costs and public expenditure as well as policy decisions – in the food and agriculture sector in fifteen developing countries.

The progress thus far with respect to zero hunger suggests that we need to accelerate our efforts. At the present rate of advancement, hunger will persist beyond 2030 and achieving the 2020 target on maintaining genetic diversity will be difficult. Malnutrition still affects an alarmingly high number of children under age 5, and foreign and domestic official investments in agriculture are lagging.

Challenges Behind the Scenes – Coordination, Data Collection and Communication

All of the SDGs have been chosen as goals in one way or another before, but never as a set of goals to be implemented in an integrated manner. The organizations involved are required to coordinate with each other, another long-standing issue to be realized.

Assessing the results of our actions, or monitoring, is crucial in achieving progress toward the goals. While data are necessary but not sufficient for meeting any goal, we can say that attainment of the SDGs would greatly depend on accurate and timely data that are analyzed systematically and made available to the public. If we are to leave no one behind and be truly inclusive, data on different social groups, namely disaggregated data, is indispensable. In fact, one of the important lessons learned from our MDG experience is that, although the goals are globally stated, the world is quite heterogenous and we need to pay attention to the divides – rural-urban, regional, demographic and income – so that development would

be attained by all, and hence sustainable. Unfortunately, disaggregation is not yet widely adopted by the national statistical systems. As much as SDGs are ambitious, they venture into territories where regular data collection is not a routine.[7] In many countries, administrative statistics – including civil registration and other fundamental data – need to be strengthened for full participation in the SDGs, which are based on the principle of national ownership. FAO is recognized as one of the key institutions in developing methods and standards for food and agriculture statistics and in providing assistance to countries in need in the field of monitoring.[8]

Finally, for galvanizing the public to take actions toward the SDGs, it is crucial to communicate with them frequently in an engaging and consistent manner. FAO has devised a communication strategy to that end, whose key message is: food and agriculture are the fundamental connection between people and the planet, and its commitment to end hunger will contribute toward achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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[1] During the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, nine sectors of society were formally distinguished as "Major Groups," through which broad participation would be facilitated in the UN activities on sustainable development: women, children and youth, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, scientific and technological community, and farmers. The inputs from the Major Groups and other stakeholders on the SDGs were coordinated by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations through its Stakeholders Engagement Programme, which included online questionnaire that was accessible to anyone with internet connection. An Open Working Group of the General Assembly was tasked with preparing a proposal on the SDGs, most of whose 30 seats were shared by several countries.

[2] The Strategic Objectives of FAO are: help eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable; reduce rural poverty; enable inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems; and increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises.

[3] The SDGs are laid out in Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. General Assembly Resolution, 70/1 of 25 September 2015. A/RES/70/1.

[4] It has been argued that other SDGs could also be simultaneously promoted by our efforts to end hunger. Hunger is related to education (Goal 4), as chronic malnutrition reduces intellectual capacity. Zero hunger is achievable by practicing sustainable agriculture, which most likely relies on affordable, easily accessible, and reliable energy supplies for operating machineries, including those for post-harvest processing, storage and transportation; it is related to Goal 7, affordable and clean energy. Finally, zero

hunger is in synch with sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), because improvements in food and nutritional security, in addition to more sustainable food production, would give a push toward inclusiveness and sustainability of cities.

[5] It concerns nine indicators under Goal 2, Zero hunger (Hunger, Severity of food insecurity, Productivity of small-scale food producers, Income of small-scale food producer, Agricultural sustainability, Conservation of genetic resources for food and agriculture, Risk status of livestock breeds, Public investment in agriculture, Food price volatility); two under Goal 5, Gender equality (Women's ownership of agricultural land, Women's equal rights to land ownership); two under Goal 6, Clean water and sanitation (Water use efficiency, Water stress); one under Goal 12, Responsible Consumption and Production (Global food losses), four under Goal 14, Life below water (Fish stocks sustainability, Illegal, unreported unregulated fishing, Value added of sustainable fisheries, Access rights for small-scale fisheries); and, three under Goal 15, Life on land (Forest area, Sustainable forest management, **Mountain Green Cover Index**). Mountain Green Cover Index is an indicator developed by FAO to monitor Target 15.4: "By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development." The Index measures changes of the green vegetation in mountain areas, on the recognition of a positive correlation between green coverage of mountain areas and their state of health and capacity to fulfil their ecosystem roles.

[6] One indicator under Goal 1, No poverty (Disaster economic loss); one under Goal 14, Frameworks for conservation and sustainable use of oceans' resources) and two under Goal 15, Life on land (Land degradation, Frameworks for fair and equitable sharing of genetic resources' benefits).

[7] An example of a novel statistics is the **Food Insecurity Experience Scale**. It is an estimate of the proportion of the population facing difficulties in accessing food, at different levels of severity, based on data collected through interviews.

[8] Most of the FAO's statistics programmes mentioned above already contain strengthening of national capacities in data collection and analysis. One of the new methodologies that FAO promotes is the **Agricultural Research Information System** (AGRIS): collection of consistent and accurate data for integrated agricultural survey systems at national and subnational levels, using Computer-Assisted Interviewing techniques.

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