

Regional/Thematic Symposium on Broadening the Application of the Sustainability Science Approach in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Berjaya Times Square Hotel, Kuala Lumpur – Malaysia, 19 - 21 December

Speech on Behalf of the Director of UNESCO Jakarta Office, Dr. Shahbaz Khan

Dear Tan Sri Professor Zakri ABDUL HAMID, Prime Minister's Office

Dr Raslan AHMAD, MIGHT

Dr. Kazuhiko TAKEUCHI, United Nations University (UNU) and University of Tokyo

Dr. Kazuo AKIYAMA, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Japan/MEXT)

Distinguished Experts, UNESCO Colleagues,

On behalf of Dr. Shahbaz Khan, the Director of UNESCO Jakarta Office – Regional Science Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, it is my pleasure to deliver these opening remarks, to welcome all of you to Kuala Lumpur, to express sincere gratitude to our Malaysian government partners for hosting this important event, and to thank our UNESCO colleagues for putting together this symposium.

We have come together for the 2nd round of discussions on advancing the global initiative to make sustainability science an enabler of evidence-based policy-making. This global initiative on sustainability science, led by UNESCO in close collaboration with its Member States, has been progressing in constructive dialectic interaction between, on the one hand, a descriptive-analytical approach spearheaded by UNESCO headquarters through a series of global consultative meetings, and on the other hand, an applied-transformational

mode pioneered by UNESCO field offices to conduct research, to test practical solutions and to feed the results obtained back into the global discussions. This is what we in Jakarta office consider our key function within this symposium – to highlight the knowledge and experiences gained through the application of sustainability science in various demonstration sites around the region – in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and the Philippines, to name a few beneficiary countries. You will hear about some of these initiatives in more detail during my presentation today. Although focusing on different communities and a wide range of environmental issues, these projects have had one common goal – to produce pragmatic, applicable and scalable models of intervention and policy recommendations for governments based on the principles of sustainability science.

We are on the learning curve of what works, and what does not work in terms of applied sustainability science framework. So what major lessons have we learned so far? We have learned that policies designed with the best scientific evidence-base may still fail if they do not meet a number of other, people-centered criteria. So as we bring scientific expertise to policymaking to roll back the environmental degradation caused by human activity, we need to pay equal attention to lifting people from poverty and empowering them to become agents of positive change.

We have also learned to appreciate the distinctive nature of complexity at the heart of most of the socio-environmental challenges. Complexity is not about the continuum from simple to more complicated, where our task is to dissolve the complex into more “manageable” bits for easier solutions. What we have observed on the ground is that the innovative transdisciplinary approaches, co-

designed with the participation of local communities and stakeholders, allow the complexity to be turned from a threat into a resource. UNESCO is in a position to work with people at the forefront of policy innovation to change the perception and the use of complexity by Member States. In other words, we need to embrace complexity, and bring to bear UNESCO's own complex mandate and multidisciplinary expertise in an integrated manner to build the capability of policymakers for complex thinking. Complex thinking is what connects us to the world because this is the way the world is.

This also happens to be the most effective way to assist with the realization of 2030 Agenda. Innovative transdisciplinary methodologies that take advantage of complexity can contribute to new, higher performing forms of governance that are of direct relevance to achievement of SDGs.

The critical question we are facing today is how to reinforce and disseminate the sustainability science methodologies and how to introduce them into the national policies. How do we address the persistent gap that prevents the producers of useful knowledge within the scientific community from transferring this knowledge to its potential users within the government? Sometimes the most direct solutions can be the most effective ones. Deepening the link between the social and natural sciences, we are using a flagship programme of Social and Human Sciences Sector – Management of Social Transformations, or MOST, to build research-policy nexus on sustainability science. More specifically we are planning to integrate the evidence and knowledge acquired through the sustainability science pilot projects into the MOST School on Sustainability Science, to be delivered for Indonesian policymakers and researchers in Padang, Sumatra on 1-3 February 2017. It will

also become part of a similar MOST School organized in South Africa by Harare Office of UNESCO on 14-17 February 2017, in a South-South cooperation scheme.

Dear Colleagues,

For UNESCO, transdisciplinarity should start from within the house. Transdisciplinarity calls for capturing the various elements of UNESCO's broad mandate, and the different outputs being produced by the 5 programmatic sectors under the conceptual umbrella of Sustainability Science. One good example is the recently launched World Social Science Report 2016: Challenging Inequalities, Pathways to a Just World. Mr. Mathieu Denis, Executive Director of International Social Science Council, with us today to discuss Inter- and trans-disciplinarity in social sciences, represents a personal bridge between Sustainability Science and the discourse on inequalities. But there are also solid thematic connections between the Report and our Symposium on Sustainability Science. The Report brings out and clarifies the negative connections between inequality and sustainability. It concludes that unchecked inequality could jeopardize the sustainability of economies, societies and communities, and unless we address this urgently, inequalities will make the cross-cutting ambition of the SDGs to leave no one behind by 2030 an empty slogan. There are several key messages derived from the Report that reflect fundamental principles behind Sustainability Science. For instance, that reducing inequalities is essential for success in other global and national priorities such as environmental sustainability, conflict resolution and migration; or that citizen and community participation – a fundamental feature of sustainability science design – is opening up space for novel policy solutions that can inspire inclusive policy innovation, including in the area of environmental sustainability.

We are living in a world where the natural and social environments are transforming faster and more dramatically than ever before. The challenge is to ensure that legislative and regulatory measures can keep pace with these changes. Since the first symposia held earlier this year in Paris, two important global developments have positively changed the global picture. The first is the entry into force of the Paris Agreement on 4 November 2016, in unprecedentedly expedient fashion. As of recently, 117 countries had ratified the Agreement, representing 80% of global emissions.

The Second trend is the SDGs. SDG were adopted back in 2015, of course, but in the recent month, countries in the Southeast Asian region have made tremendous advances in the critical task of nationalizing the Goals, and adopting national targets and indicators. In most countries, this has been an open and participatory process involving close consultations with civil society. Closer that we link Sustainability Science with the new SDG paradigm, easier it will become to bring the policymakers to think in terms of sustainability science when designing socio-environmental policies.

A key link between sustainability science and SDGs is the notion of Social Inclusion. We know this not only in theory, but also from our practice. The pilot projects funded through the generous support of the Japanese, Malaysian and Indonesian governments through the funds-in-trust arrangements, have given us a chance to turn this principle into action. Implemented in collaboration with the national stakeholders in their respective regions, the pilot projects have demonstrated that “putting people first” is the best way to address the environmental problems caused by unsustainable economic practices. This means listening to people, gaining nuanced knowledge of the problems they face, and identifying their root causes. It also means coming up with solutions

that address the environmental issues, and at the same time tackle the social and economic causes that might have led to the environmental degradation. And it means doing this through sustained consultation with the local community, the policymakers, the civil society and the academic establishment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of UNESCO Jakarta Office director, I would like to thank wholeheartedly our Japanese partners for their unwavering commitment to the advancement of sustainability science, and for their financial support of the related initiatives, including these series of conferences. The Japanese Funds in Trust modality, generously provided through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, has been an invaluable source for advancing the global agenda of sustainability science. I would also like to thank the Malaysian government and partners for hosting this event, and for their significant share of financial support to our sustainability science initiatives in the region. I wish you dynamic, fruitful deliberations.